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CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND TEACHING ESL STUDENTS: A SCHOOL BASED ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

BY

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND TEACHING ESL STUDENTS: A SCHOOL BASED ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT submitted by DIANE WISHART LEARD in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in International/Intercultural Education.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the inequities that exist within the policies and practices of a culturally diverse school environment and their possible effects on ESL student learning. Understanding the underlying causes of inequities creates opportunities to develop new policies and practices that allow all students to be treated fairly. Action research provided a space to examine and reflect on the existing relationships in the school in an attempt to understand how they influence student learning. This action research project included an outside facilitator which adds another dimension to the relationships. Reflections on this aspect highlight the ways in which our personal theoretical understandings affect actions within the group. We all infuse our knowledge into the group through an interplay of power relations which we can begin to understand based on shared meanings of how power operates and how it may circulate in this context. Analysis of the study was done using concepts of Multicultural and Anti-Racism Education coupled with current culture and identity theoretical perspectives. Added to this is the relevance of the hermeneutic notion of experience to the research findings. This project highlights the importance, to student learning, of getting to know students and parents particularly in a culturally diverse, ESL school environment.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The existence of racism and segregation within many Canadian schools is highlighted by rapid changes in ethno-cultural diversity in recent decades and a growing awareness of the often negative affects of schooling on minority and ESL children specifically, but also on overall group relations. Minority communities have long accused Canadian schools of an ethnocentric and unequal program of education (Mukherjee, 1990). Although many provinces and school boards now accept the realism of these statements, there is little consensus on what to do about it. Overcoming resistance to change is a major obstacle and one which will take time, patience and creativity to overcome. Coming to realize life in a pluralistic society requires an acknowledgment of the interdependence of people as a small part of a larger, constantly evolving system opens up possibilities for school based change directed at the realization of a just and equitable society.

This study provides an example of a culturally diverse school that has recognized that inequities exist within their school environment that tend to put minority and ESL students at a disadvantage. The project was initiated as an attempt to understand the root causes of these differences in learning opportunities and develop directions to address them. As an initiative that is consistent with multicultural education concepts, this project looks at opening up discussions around issues of race, culture, language, identity and discrimination and intervening in areas where problems are perceived to exist. This was done by implementing an action research framework which provided a space for teachers, administrators, and myself as an outside researcher to examine relationships within the school and their possible effects on student learning. My own reflections on this process were done through a theoretical framework based on current concepts of Multicultural and Anti-Racism Education which I believe are informed by recent writings on culture and identity. I have made a conscientious effort to accurately represent the voices of all research participants based

on note taking of what was actually said and on what I believe to be the common understandings we reached. Added to this are my thoughts on the relevance of the hermeneutic notion of experience to the research findings.

Why Action Research and Hermeneutic Inquiry?

Reflections on self and society need to occur within schools. As identities are molded and shaped, in large part, in these institutions, it is here where the greatest impact can be realized. Curriculum and teaching practices are formed by culture and identity. Action research provides an appropriate method for examining the effects of these issues in schools. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986) the teacher is part of a critical community made up of teachers, students, parents and others responsible for the development and reform of education. Collaborative action research, a participatory democratic approach to social change, provides a method for realizing a self-reflective critical community committed to positive educational change. It addresses a double dialectic of thought and action and individual and society. What action research aims to improve is one's own educational practice through understanding of these practices and the situations in which one practices. As action research is based on a view of truth and action as socially constructed and historically embedded, it seems to fit with the concerns advocated in this paper. Personal knowledge and understanding are key to the action research process as is reflection on a just and equitable society.

Action research has been employed as a way to greater understanding and change in social justice projects in our schools. Carson (1992) outlines the results of a project titled, "Collaborative Action Research in Peace Education" in which a group of educators worked together to implement education for peace in various work settings. The group felt they moved toward a deeper appreciation of the dimensions of peace education as defined by Toh and Cawagas (1987). These dimensions include a rejection of militarization, a concern for structural violence, the promotion of human rights, intercultural solidarity, and development of personal peace. Action as a collaborative

process followed a cycle consisting of reflection, planning, acting, observing, reflecting and replanning. Through this process the group developed some critical insights, particularly the fact that there are ambiguities and difficulties in educating for peace. Carson reflects that this peace education process was an example of hermeneutically oriented action research. Interpretation was a necessary component in coming to understand the difficulties in peace education and in developing directions for future action. Learning to relate to each other and the world in ways that are peaceful and just is not an easy task. Personal reflection directed at interpretive understanding of ourselves and others can help us to understand our current practices and ways to improve on them.

As interpretation is necessary with topics such as peace education and multicultural education, hermeneutic inquiry allows us to acknowledge that we do not know the answers but allows us to listen to as many voices as possible to help guide the way. Action research, as a way of understanding, becomes a hermeneutics of practice attending to the way we are with our partners in schools (Carson, 1992). The question of the relationship between hermeneutics and action research has been taken up by Smits (1997) among others. Smits states that hermeneutics is committed to a persistent search for questions about meaning, the kind of questions that resist easy answers or solutions. Educational action research is also concerned with these types of questions, but at a more practical level and geared toward immediate action. We need to remain open to our experiences and encounters with the world and from these, create new meanings. Hermeneutics challenges us to think about these encounters, particularly in light of the Western notion of individual consciousness. Creativity exists within language and within our responsibility to others. We must create new solidarities in social life and work toward understanding through developing spaces for dialogue and new identities.

The Evolution of Multiculturalism in Canada

Multicultural education in Canada has evolved out of a long history of a multicultural society. Canadian society has always been culturally diverse and continually changing in cultural composition. Ongoing debates engaged in by many players in the public forum have helped to provide direction to a landscape that is changing, not only as a result of immigration, but also due to public policy regarding multiculturalism. Many Native cultural groups coexisted prior to the arrival of European settlers. A racial dimension was added to this polyethnicity with the beginnings of white settlement. The original United Empire Loyalists in Upper Canada included both German and British settlers. Added to this were Black, Chinese, Irish, East Indian, and Jewish settlements although their numbers were quite small. According to Wilson (1996) Canada's Fathers of Confederation envisioned a heterogeneous plural society transcending differences of ethnic origins and religions. However, relations within this ideal reflected a different reality. The struggle between England and France for control of the colony is a struggle that is still with us today as are the difficulties between these two "founding nations" and the nationhood of Native peoples. Added to this are the voices of all other groups who are struggling to be heard.

Ng (1993) outlines a series of events that occured during the fur trade period. Initially, the English and French recruited Native men to act as intermediaries between themselves and Native groups. In conflicts between French and English, and between the English and the US, alliances were made between these groups and various Native tribes. Many English and French officials also had Native women as wives or concubines. In this way, they gained access to Native kinship systems furthering the means of bringing Native groups into trading relations. These relations eventually destroyed the Native people's communal life of hunting and gathering and transformed this mode of production into capitalism. These relations also created a new group, the Metis, who first acted as intermediaries as well. As trading relations stabilized, Metis

people were no longer needed to fulfill this role and were ultimately rejected by both European and Native groups. Once the wars between French and English, and between the English and the United States had ended, relations with Native people changed from that of ally to subject of the Crown. In this period of imperialist expansion an ideology of superiority and inferiority of "races" emerged based primarily on a groups' means of production. European ideology was rooted in the notion of private property and Christian morality. As the economy moved from mercantile to industrial capitalism, more land was needed for agricultural development and westward expansion of the railway. Native peoples' lifestyles were incompatible with the dominant culture's need to expand. Education played a central role in assimilating these groups by imposing what Ng refers to as "cultural conformity".

From the beginning, Canada's immigration policy contradicted its own ideal as reflected in concern for the impact of immigration on the racial and ethnocultural composition of the country. The years between 1867 and 1895 were a primarily free-entry period for immigration in Canada operating on the assumption the supply and demand for population would produce equilibium (Driedger, 1996). However, within this open approach there were periodically Orders-in-Council excluding destitute or Chinese immigrants. From 1896 - 1914, immigration was aggressively promoted to provide an opportunity for the development of primary resources, especially to western Canada. Free land was offered first to northern European immigrants and, when this did not produce enough response, to eastern and southern Europeans (Driedger, 1996). Initially, cultural assimilation was important and immigrants from northern and western Europe were believed to blend in quickly (Wilson, 1996). Ng (1993) reminds us that the years from 1880 - 1920 are often refered to as the nation-building period. Male immigrants were needed to help develop the infrastructure for economic growth. Most of these immigrants were farmers so were able to meet the population needs of the

prairies. As well, many were farm workers so were able to provide needed labor on the prairies.

Also at this time, many single working class women arrived from Europe to become domestic servants and wives (Ng, 1993). This immigration was controlled by women initially but gradually taken over by government employees who were predominantly men. This change tended to shift the focus more toward immigration directed at meeting economic needs. Group immigration was also encouraged at this time making possible the entrance of large numbers of non-English and non-French immigrants (Driedger, 1996). The nation-building period also witnessed Canada's transition from a primarily rural agrarian society to an urban industrial one. In the transition to a modern nation state, political power became more centralized. Migrant labor was also used in this time period for specific purposes. Chinese men were brought into Canada through an indentured labor system to build the railway. These men were not allowed to bring their wives and children with them, or to become British subjects, in order that the white race in Canada would be preserved (Ng, 1993).

Between World War I and World War II socioeconomic problems arose in Canada, combined with political tension in Europe, resulting in a decline in the number of agrarian immigrants. The First World War had virtually cut off immigration and the 1930s Depression and the Second World War also discouraged immigration greatly (Driedger, 1996). Both wars created negative sentiments against Germans such as the Hutterites and Mennonites who were briefly restricted as immigrants. Demand continued for balanced population growth to meet the needs of economic prosperity and national integrity following the second world war. A larger labor force was needed but immigrants were selected carefully with those who were white and Christian given preferential treatment. Over the next two decades two million immigrants arrived, with the vast majority of them being from Europe. Polish veterans were originally brought in as farm laborers, followed by Croatians, Serbs, and then Dutch. Some displaced

refugees were allowed including a few Jewish people. In 1947, the first Canadian Citizenship Act came into being which defined Canadians as something other than British subjects. This rejection of the need for anglo-conformity began a new set of dynamics related to Canada's national identity (Fleras & Elliott, 1992). This Act allowed Canadian citizens to sponsor relatives from other countries with the stipulation that they would have to work for the first two years after arrival in certain sectors including railway, mining, and domestic. Restrictions on German, Japanese, and Asian entires were increasingly lifted (Driedger, 1996).

With the economy booming in the 1950s, the shortage of labor continued. This time period marks the beginning of South Asian immigration although the numbers were very small. Competition for preferred immigrants increased worldwide particularly with Australia beginning mass immigration. Canada responded with the Assisted Passage program which was in place from 1951 - 1955. In 1957, John Diefenbaker's Conservative government reformed the refugee system, cutting the numbers allowed into the country. Following the decline in the British economy, many immigrants came to Canada on the sponsorship program. The sheer numbers of immigrants arriving created a backlash, so the sponsorship program was also cut back. The new immigration act in 1962 reflected growing concern that Canada's racially selective immigration policies were outdated (Fleras & Elliott, 1992). The policy eliminated the preference for "suitable" minorities from the selection process and introduced a set of universal criteria for entry.

Polyethnicity became much more complicated by the 1960s and 1970s. Traditional sources of immigrants were beginning to dry up and Canada's birth rates were declining. Canada needed population growth. As a result, immigration from Third World countries began to increase. At the same time, the language debate was heating up in Quebec. In 1963, Lester Pearson announced the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Although the Commission's report alerted Canadians

to the gravity of their national crisis with respect to Quebec, it did little to acknowledge Native peoples and immigrant groups (Bothwell, Drummond & English, 1989). In 1966, the White Paper on Sponsorship favored family reunification, followed in 1967 by the Point System which made some strides toward eliminating the color barrier. Four classes of immigrants were defined in this system: family, independent, entrepreneur, and refugee (Fleras & Elliott, 1992). The landmark changes brought about by the Pearson government in 1967 were based on a number of factors. Canada's declining birthrate coupled with a decrease in the numbers of immigrants coming from Europe created a population need. Another factor was "a growing unease in government circles with the suggestion that Canada was a country for whites only" (L.Martin, *The Edmonton Journal,* April 27, 1999).

These changes eventually resulted in Canada becoming "the most multi-ethnic nation on the planet" (L.Martin, *The Edmonton Journal,* April 27, 1999). As Canada became increasingly diverse, it became necessary to articulate a vision and a policy designed to achieve tolerance and mutual respect. Canada was facing a confederation crisis precipitated by economic and social conditions that required a reorganization of the relationships between the federal government and the many heterogeneous Canadian societies (Kach & Kim, 1991). The old framework of the constitution based on unequal partnership between the two "founding nations" needed to change to reflect Canada's true population makeup. In 1971, Pierre Trudeau announced the Policy of Multiculturalism in response to pressure from minority cultural groups.

Fleras and Elliott (1992) outline reasons leading to official multiculturalism in Canada. Multiculturalism evolved in response to changes brought about from increased immigration from non-European sources, the decline of the British Empire in Canada and anglo-identity, the crisis in Quebec-Ottawa relations, and the growing encroachment of American cultural imperialism. They believe that multiculturalism grew out of more than the simple fact of racial and cultural diversity in Canada. It was

the awareness of this diversity followed by its subsequent expression at social and political levels. What has also been important in establishing a multicultural presence is growing ethnocultural assertiveness to remain apart at some level. This assertion of identity and affiliation with others who share a common ancestry, referred to as ethnicity, seems to be growing in Canadian society. Official multiculturalism was designed to bind together diverse elements of Canadian society into a coherent entity that would be widely acceptable to all Canadians. The policy was intended to recognize the contribution of diversity to Canadian society. However, the reasons for multiculturalism and the ways to achieve it remain unclear to many Canadians.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Policy has been controversial since its inception. Kach & Kim (1991) suggest this controversy is due in part because of the complexity of the concept of multiculturalism. The idea evolved, in part, out of attempts to resolve the constitutional crisis between the French and English groups, rather than solely from any attempt to address the problems arising from the multicultural mix of Canada. Quebec interpreted the policy as a betrayal of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, seeing it as an attempt to water down French language and culture. Others, including some ethnic groups, believed it was just a way to appease ethnic groups. Both the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party have criticized federal multicultural funding for encouraging ethnic ghettos. Cultural pluralism within a bilingual framework can be read as implying a dominance of the two founding cultures over other cultures. "Multiculturalism ... was basically a policy of limited tolerance and limited goodwill offered by the state to the one third of the population perceived as cultural minorities" (Kach & Kim, 1991: p.19).

Canada's multicultural policy welcomed all people for what they were and for what they were presumed to represent. In recent years there has been an increase in demands for recognition of difference and diversity. However, these demands are often articulated in essentialist and exclusionary terms that ignore the historical and

contemporary variability of race and the processes involved in identity formation. The consequence of this is a fragmented political space in which meaningful dialogue over difference is greatly limited (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). In Canada, official multiculturalism is promoted through financial support given by the government. In this way, the preservation of minority cultures is subject to the authoritive judgement of the government (Kach & Kim, 1991).

On the other hand, the policy of multiculturalism can be viewed as meaningful progression in attempts to resolve problems in the interracial/intercultural relations within Canada. Many minority Canadians have been the victims of discrimination and bias. Prior to 1962, immigration policies were racially selective and formally discriminated against many minority groups. Examples of discrimmination can be seen in the 1885 introduction of a Chinese head tax and during the Second World War when we had official persecution against German and Japanese-Canadians who had been labeled as "enemy aliens". Compared with these types of policies, multiculturalism was a big step forward. Regardless of motive, the actions of the Trudeau government had a huge impact on the lives of minority Canadians by encouraging them to assert themselves as individuals and/or as groups. Official multiculturalism has proved to be a step in eliminating the disparities that exist between groups. It must, however, be viewed as part of an ongoing process that needs to evolve if we are to move forward as a nation (Kach & Kim, 1991). Fleras and Elliott (1992) believe the framework of multiculturalism allows us to sort out questions about who we are as Canadians, what vision of Canada we see, and how we intend to achieve national consensus without loss of our integrity as a nation. We need to analyze multiculturalism within the broader context of Canadian society and history. Within this framework we can sort out potentially competing principles of individualism and collectivism, culture and equality, and folklore and race relations.

In 1987, the Multicultural Act, Bill C-93 came into effect. At this point, the debate on multiculturalism began to change. Some of the debate centered around the concept of rights and freedoms which encourage these rights with little consideration for what limits it is reasonable to place on them. Equality of rights initiatives, together with anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action programs, promote social equality at the expense of individual liberty and political process. The process of enhancing status for ethnic minorities is making the containment policies of the 1970s irrelevant. Also in 1987, Keith Spicer, Canada's first Commissioner of Official Languages, began to espouse the notion of assimilation. The backlash against multiculturalism seemed in some cases to have taken on a tone of ethnocentricity (Wilson, 1996).

The failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990 indicates we have yet to "strike a balance between Quebec's distinct society status and minority rights within a multicultural setting" (Fleras & Elliott, 1992, p. 174). The attempt with this accord was mainly to restore the older notion of an English-French constitutional framework by according Quebec constitutional privileges. Although the effort was thwarted primarily by Native people who also wished to claim distinct status, resistance also came from Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland who did not wish to be lumped together as a single interest group of English Canada. Different and conflicting regional interests will have to be recognized as being part of the mix in Canada before national consensus can be achieved. A lesson to be learned from the Meech Lake event is that we need to question our approach to promoting multiculturalism within a bilingual framework against a backdrop of language pluralism. Heritage and aboriginal languages, as well as an understanding of differences and diversity may need to be reflected in the overall framework (Kach & Kim, 1991).

The Role for Education

The need to understand this ethnocentrism is a role for education. According to Ng (1993) formal education in Canada has always served as an assimilation tool. As our economy evolved through the acquisition of private property and industrial capitalism, agricultural development necessitated the elimination of nomadic lifestyles. Education served as the means for the dominant group to impose cultural conformity upon "subordinated" groups. The idea of assimilation means the continuance of policies and practices that make it easier for those groups who have traditionally held power in our society to continue to hold power. One of these policies is the bilingual framework within which all groups have to fit. The policy of multiculturalism was designed to protect and assist minority cultural groups while ensuring the continuance of privileges of the two founding groups (Kach & Kim, 1991). In order to be more inclusive, the overall framework is going to have to be based on greater understanding of the fact that Canada is much more diverse than is reflected in the notion of two founding nations. However, for the major constitutional change that a more inclusive framework would require, the Canadian public may need greater understanding of the issues of power and representation that are inherent in public policy. Herein lies a role for multicultural education.

Education in Canada is a provincial matter and for this reason the Canadian government's policy of multiculturalism does not have direct impact on Canadian schools. However, most provincial governments endorsed the federal policy and have adopted some multicultural education practices as outlined by Kach & Kim (1991). Alberta and Manitoba had already begun to implement programs by the time the federal government policy was tabled in the House of Commons. Within four years, Ontario had adopted a policy of multicultural education, encouraging schools to provide ESL programs, sensitive responses to cultural differences, and unbiased curriculum materials. Heritage Language Programs were created in Ontario in 1977 which turned

out to be extremely popular. These evolved out of Saturday Schools which had existed in Ontario for decades. Saturday Schools in Alberta were also extremely well attended by minority students. Within 10 years of the official adoption of multicultural policy, Alberta had 10 bilingual public and 3 bilingual separate schools. Beyond the language programs, multicultural education programs have been problematic in that they tend to focus on teaching tokens of cultures, sometimes referred to as the food, fairs, and festivals approach. It is this approach that tends to essentialize groups and create stereotypes that are then used as the basis for discrimination (Kach & Kim, 1991).

Davidson (1996) shows a relationship between ethnic identity and academic engagement, and how schools play a role in shaping these outcomes. Students come to school with meanings developed in the home and community, constantly shaped and reshaped by ongoing interactions. Although the construction of identities is highly complex, schools can either nurture or reshape these meanings. Teachers are viewed as privileged authorities possessing knowledge to be absorbed and passed on. This power, which Foucault defines as "action upon an action", structures the course of conduct between teacher and student. Although resistance can be a part of this relationship, power defines the terms of relationships in advance. The ways in which teachers and schools convey ethnically and "racially" relevant meanings become a part of students' conceptualizations of themselves. This in turn affects outward displays of behavior, others' responses to those behaviors and reconceptualizations of identities.

Power in a relationship validates certain experiences over others. When experience is taken as historical evidence, it reproduces particular ideological systems. Examinations of historical experience need to highlight how differences have been relationally constituted and how individual identities have been formed through experience. Our experiences become a process by which we perceive and comprehend our relations with others and, in fact, with the larger historical context. How we perceive experience is influenced by both external factors and subjective feeling, that is,

both social life and the values, norms and kinship relations we bring to that experience (Scott, 1991). Through our own experience we view the experiences of others and our relation to those around us and to the larger society. Hermeneutics, a way of understanding meaning through interpretation, helps us to understand this continually evolving interplay between the whole and the individual parts.

Cummins (1994) argues that schools communicate subtle messages to students regarding the value of their prior experiences and the appropriateness of their language and culture to the context of their new country. Students whose culture and language are valued by the wider society and therefore their schools as well, succeed to a greater extent than those whose backgrounds are devalued. The experiences students bring to schools constitutes the foundation for future learning and needs to be enhanced throughout the schooling process in order to achieve optimum success. Cultural identities are likely to be validated, for example, by programs which attempt to add second languages to first languages rather than those which attempt to replace first languages. Not only will second language learning be enhanced through the transfer of cognitive power from conceptual knowledge possessed in first language, but self confidence can be boosted through the process.

Although schools as institutions play significant roles in shaping students' identities, there is also a reciprocal influence between student ideologies and school contexts. That is, schools shape students' identities but students also shape schools. Alternate ideologies and resistance to exisiting policies and practices continually shape dominant ideologies and ways of doing things. It is this relationship that needs to be examined by schools to determine where and how racism may exist in the school and what course of action would best lead to elimination of practices which have a negative affect on students' personal identities. What also needs to be considered are the blending of cultural elements and the crossing of social divisions by many individuals.

New ethnicities and unique perspectives contribute to new world views and understandings of the complexities of our current realities.

This action research project is a response to the recognition that schools play a significant role in students' understandings of how they fit into society. This is reflected in Emma's thought that "kids (at this school) can and should be involved in social justice issues as it would be good for their self esteem. They don't always have to be on the receiving end". The project is also a recognition that students with particular backgrounds have a decreased chance of success within many of our current school practices leading to decreased opportunities in wider society. These backgrounds often include immigrant or ESL experiences. Cultural bias in the curriculum was also perceived by the research group to be a problem. The school's hope for the project was that it would bring about better understandings and specific teaching strategies that would improve the learning opportunities for these students and ultimately improve life chances.

Personal Context

The idea of complex identities and how to build on their interrelationships is of personal interest to me and has directed me toward this study. As I reflect on my own perceptions, assumptions and understandings of the world I recognize that power dynamics existed in my own childhood schooling. Growing up in a small, farming community in southwestern Manitoba in the sixties and early seventies was relevant to shaping my attitudes toward the thinking of that particular time and place. The community was predominantly White with a few Native people and very few other minorities. Difference was dealt with either by attempts to assimilate people or, in the case of handicapped students, by hiding them from view. Handicapped children were in a segregated classroom which began and finished at different times from the rest of the school. This resulted in the rest of the student body rarely seeing any of these students.

The community and school served an area that was mainly agricultural. A few small industries also offered sources of employment including a farm implement plant and a distillery. The few "white collar" jobs included doctors, a lawyer, an accountant, and a few government administrators and business men. Families were mainly one income with stay at home mothers. Travel was limited as was media access. The town had television and radio stations from Brandon and Winnipeg. For the most part, what we received from media, school, and families was a sheltered, narrow view of the world. I recall my own beliefs in the superiority of the White, Western lifestyle and realize now that I had no understanding of the power relations that existed in the world. Unfortunately, much of the thinking that was prevalent then still exists today.

Two decades later, living in Edmonton, I began to reflect on the broader influences of getting to know people who originated from parts of the world unfamiliar to me or whose lifestyles varied greatly from my own. This led to greater understanding of similarities and differences. Neighbors have played prominently in this process as I have developed relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds as our children played together. Enrollment as a Masters student in International / Intercultural Education has also played a major role in shaping who I am, by exposing me to global issues and understandings of the causes of suffering in the world and the interconnectedness of all those who inhabit it. Being presented with the notion of a PEACE paradigm as an alternate and more appropriate form of "development" has highlighted the issues of structural violence, equity, ecological considerations and what can be done at the grass roots level through critical empowerment (Toh, 1987). An examination of the issues of poverty, disease, homelessness, unemployment, urban slums, rural underdevelopment, illiteracy, vast inequalities, and human rights highlights these concerns as structural violence. Having reflected on these issues I now understand their relevance to Edmonton classrooms and the inequalities that exist in opportunities for student learning. Personal discussions

with others regarding the structures that exist in global relations and are reflected in smaller society come to be understood in terms of the cultural relations that exist within a particular school environment. Beyond an understanding of the issues, involvement in my Masters program also meant involvement in discussions of social action strategies and what can be done to level the playing field in Edmonton schools.

Involvement in a local non-profit organization whose mandate includes the provision of peace education programs for youth has also shaped who I am and my interest in societal transformation through local involvement in schools. Many of the youth programs addressed issues of culture, racism, discrimination, poverty, and the environment. The conferences and seminars brought together youth of many different cultural backgrounds who were very interested in working together to implement strategies in their schools and communities which would lead to addressing some of these issues. Beyond the specific activities of the organization, being affiliated with them has caused me to think about global issues and helped focus my thoughts on personal peace through philosophy. Gandhian philosophy has contributed to a personal belief in service to others as the ultimate goal.

Gandhi believed that in spite of diversity and complexity, there is unity in all life. As we all participate in the same cosmic reality, we are all intimately interrelated. It is therefore not possible to hurt someone else without ultimately hurting or damaging oneself. Narrow notions of identity lead to separateness and division while expanded identification with the whole of humanity will allow us a glimpse at the truth. Through service to others we can come to understanding and enlightenment (de Mallac, 1989). Becoming aware of the world around us through contemplation will enable us to practice peace in the present moment. If we live our present time and place mindfully, we will know what to do and how to act in the direction of peace (Thich, 1991).

Identity Politics

Historical events have led to the development of relations of inequality which are evident in our present educational system and, in turn, lead to the continuance of these types of relations. Continued reflection on these events may lead to understanding of how and why particular events occurred. Developing a sensitivity toward understanding of the past includes a need to reflect on our own identities and power relations with others in the context of current educational practices. We all bring to education, a unique, constantly evolving hybrid identity. Hybridity refers to the fact that the building of identity is an ongoing process. Identity is never fixed and is continually influenced by those around us. Bhabha (1995) points out that cultural difference is the process of working out the divisions of past and present through current cultural representations. Identifying the cultural other is also the point of self-identification. This identity construction through difference constitutes the power to claim that difference as identity. Power also exists between cultures, in a "Third Space" of daily social interactions where struggles for identity and representation are worked out. Hall (1995), would agree when he says that one is never in complete control of the mechanisms of identity construction. Likewise, one is never completely controlled by the identity construction of others. We have recently seen a significant shift in cultural politics to cultural communities actively engaged in a struggle for representation. Dei (1996) points out that it is important to remember that identity is not entirely dependent on categories of difference because social practice transcends these boundaries all the time. Categories of race, class, and gender are compelling structures, but are also elastic in that they bend and do not entirely define the limits of social actions. Our identities are developed through social interaction in conjunction with categories of difference and identity.

Although identity is always hybrid, recognition needs to be given to the building of identities through group membership which do not recognize this hybrid

dimension. Identities can be unifying as groups struggle for representation or to overcome their marginal status. Cultural politics and strategies develop around group identity. Hall (1995) believes that events, relations and structures do exist and have effects in the way they are represented, but it is how they are talked about that provides the greatest meaning. Culture and ideology play a role in social and political life through group action. Differences come together in politics while still acknowledging the construction of new identities. It is this process of developing new identities that schools need to engage in, where we can develop difference and diversity rather than needing to marginalize others in order to understand ourselves. Schools also need to understand the reasons behind group affiliations and identification and how political power plays out within the educational environment.

Smith (1997) recognizes this struggle as a cultural impasse or crisis of identity. We have been educated to believe we can discover ourselves through accumulations and achievements. This fiction of our own autonomy is enhanced and reinforced by schools where empty spaces are filled with activities with no time or encouragement given to reflection. As we can see from the rapidly growing interest in identity as a field of study, it has come to be recognized as important, particularly to schooling. Recent recognition that the contemporary focus of Western identity, on self in relation to others, has become problematic, leads to questions of how to get beyond this self focus and provide our students with some sense of collective responsibility. Many non-Western perspectives are beginning to be offered as alternatives. Smith provides an example in Buddhism and the action of being awake to what sustains us as human beings as being relevant to this crisis. Enlightenment comes from understanding the source of human suffering. Reflecting on our lifestyles is a necessary precondition to developing solutions to address the crisis of identity. Through reflection and meditation we can focus more on interrelated meanings and holistic methods of teaching and learning as a means to lead students to positive self discovery. Reflection and

meditation can help us to know and understand our students and encourage students to understand themselves and others. We need to move away from the concepts of Self and Other and focus our discussions of identity on the ways we are all molded and shaped by each other. In this way, we can learn to accept all others.

Although I believe we need to move more toward this approach to understanding the human condition and the system we share with all other species, we also need to recognize the unequal playing field we have created. Group identity and reflections on how individual identities form in relation to others may be a necessary precondition to acceptance of the other by allowing its members an opportunity to develop positive notions of self and mobilizing action toward social and economic equality. Understanding the hybrid nature of identities may enable us to move toward thinking that recognizes our differences and recognizes that we are all on the same level. Infusion of Eastern wisdom traditions into our discussions of identity in schools may help us begin to transform ourselves and our society.

The need for group identity is pointed to by Trinh (1995) in her discussions of center and margin as a basis for classifying oneself in relation to others. We often account for difference by assigning people to a "one-place-fits-all 'other' category" based on "measuring with inadequate sticks" (Trinh, 1995, p.215). How we place people into categories is based in large part on relations of power that put some groups in the centre and others in the margins or periphery. Often those who occupy the periphery accept this position, but many now resist. The struggle for position and power is part of group identity politics. The centre, or dominant groups, like to acknowledge others' cultures because it helps to preserve its own position of power and dominance. Marginality, however, exists in both the centre and the margins. Centre and margins rely on each other for their very existence and are part and parcel of the same reality. We position ourselves within this power dynamic by viewing ourselves in relation to others. When this measure is based on superficial or stereotypical knowledge

of others then our own position must reflect these inaccuracies as well. Given then that marginality exists in both centre and margin positions we can look at new discussions of power. We can see differences not only between insider and outsider, but also within the outsider or the insider. In response to Foucault, Gore (1993) points out that power in modern society is exercised on axis both vertical and horizontal - it is pervasive, omnipresent and capillary. Power exists as a relationship for those who are often unaware they exercise it, and do not impose it intentionally. Power is not necessarily repressive and can always be resisted.

Research Context

The study I participated in was an action research project carried out at an inner city school. This research is part of a larger project entitled, "Cultural Integration and Teaching", initiated by the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. The school is a Catholic elementary / junior high school located just north-west of the downtown core of the city of Edmonton. It serves an older neighborhood that is in transition from being an area of well established single family dwellings to a district of mainly rental properties and low cost multi-unit housing. South and east of the school lies a commercial strip with a concentration of Vietnamese and Chinese businesses. North of the school lies the Edmonton Industrial Airport. The families of the students at this school come from many corners of the world including South East Asia, the Philippines, South America, and the Middle East. In addition to these recent immigrants, there are also a number of First Nations and other Canadian born students whose first language may or may not be English. The school has a large number of English as a Second Language (ESL) students (125 out of a total school population of 340).

The action research project evolved out of a common interest in issues of culture and teaching between the school and the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. Initial meetings with Emma, the school's Assistant Principal

indicated a strong interest in the action research project and the potential it offered for change within the school. The school was particularly interested in:

1. questions of language acquisition for ESL learners
2. ethical concerns related to culture and the curriculum
3. ways to equalize opportunities for all students
4. action research and the potential it offered for school-based change.

My role in the process was that of facilitator. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986) the facilitator's role in relation to educational practices and the collaborative nature of action research can assist to expose aspects of social order that resist change. Although there are different roles facilitators can play, in this practical action research project, my role was to form cooperative relationships with the research team, helping them to articulate their research concerns, assist with planning action for change and reflect on and monitor the process. Participants monitored their own educational practices with the aim of developing their own individual judgment. The facilitator's role was to provide a sounding board against which practitioners may try out ideas. It is important, in Carr and Kemmis's view, that the facilitator cease to have an active role once a self-critical and self-reflective community has been established. Action research also involves keeping a journal to record progress of the group and personal reflections. This includes recording relevant information presented and dialogue on key issues. My action research journal provides the basic data for this thesis.

Research Issues

Discussions with Emma revealed two initial areas of concern at the school, either or both having potential to develop into action research questions. One issue is cultural bias in the curriculum. The school feels there are places in the curriculum and literature where assumptions are made. The assumption that everyone has had particular Canadian experiences favors those born in Canada and adversely affects other students' learning. Some members of the school staff believe these assumptions are evidence of

racism. If we take racism to be "systems of domination and subordination that have developed over time as taken-for-granted societal features" (Ng, 1993, p.51), then certainly a case can be made for treating these curriculum assumptions as forms of racism. According to Pinar (1993) curriculum is a highly significant form of representation in which we choose how we wish to represent ourselves as a society. Identity is a central concept in that identity is formed and expressed through representation, and therefore, through the curriculum. For ESL students then, language used in the curriculum is not only important for their understanding of the material, but also as it relates to identity and self esteem. For all students there are messages in the curriculum about where certain groups fit within the overall scheme of things. Relations amongst peers are also important in terms of identity development, however, this was not a question that was pursued by the research group. Upon inquiring about peer relations I was told that they are generally positive within the school environment. That is, cultural cliques do not seem to be obvious and no particular racial tension is evident. These relations do, however, have a role to play and need to be looked at in future research initiatives.

It is important for teachers to identify where assumptions and inappropriate representations are being made and develop strategies to deal with them. Embedded in this issue is a desire to make theory meet practice. Most teachers at the school believe they teach ESL students well, yet they see them as a "handicap" in the classroom. It is hoped that reflection will highlight this issue and offer some understanding into how all students can contribute to the learning environment. Practice needs to reflect the notion that everyone has something to offer. Action research places the burden to change directly on teachers while giving them some concrete strategies to do so.

The other important issue for the action research group was the question of how to improve language acquisition for ESL students. For many ESL students, who are learning English as their academic language, there is little opportunity for English to

come together with their first language. The issue of language is complex and creates challenges for schools to address. Emma noted that "ESL students need opportunities to enhance their first language in order to utilize it to discuss concepts learned in English". The school has recognized there is more than self-esteem and preservation of culture involved in teaching first languages. Toward this end, they have introduced Vietnamese as a course. As well, they encourage students with like languages to discuss concepts which have been presented in English.

Other challenges to teaching second languages involve presenting material which the ESL student can make sense of and is motivated to learn. In other words, it must have sufficient meaning in the individual's context. What is meaningful varies based on the student's personal attributes and ability to make sense of the material. Cummins (1994) points out that age, cognitive abilities, literacy in first language, personality and confidence all play a part in student's ability to acquire a second language. Language must also be actively used by the learner for optimum learning to occur. Passive reception is not enough. Through interaction, students can question and negotiate meanings thereby enhancing understanding. Here, speakers of first languages, including teachers, affect the understandings of second language learners (Cummins, 1994). These are some of the specific challenges teachers at this school are currently addressing.

It is hoped through this project we can begin to move toward improved teaching practices and understanding leading to improved relations and learning at this school. By identifying areas within schooling that may be contributing toward the perpetuation of existing inequalities in education, we can start to make changes to improve learning opportunities and ultimately, life chances. Helping students to build positive identities through relations with, and understandings of, others will guide us along the road to emancipatory social change. Our planetary interdependence requires that we begin to move in the direction of deeper understanding and peacefulness. For students this

means being comfortable with, understanding, and relating to people with different cultural norms, values and family traditions as well as recognizing different historical perspectives and contemporary issues. For educators it means recognizing these differences and tailoring education to meet the needs of a diverse classroom and building on the unique characteristics of students.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

ISSUES OF CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

The Need for Multicultural/Anti-Racism Education

Through experience, teachers involved in this action research project have come to see how oppressive structures have served to deny equal access to education for certain cultural groups, particularly those members who are learning English as a second language. However, despite the existence of structures that attempt to reproduce dominant cultural, political, and economic ideologies, schools are also sites of contestation between groups for power to define what knowledge is represented in schools (Dei, 1996). Resistance by both students and teachers are challenging the existing culture of dominance. Kelly (1998), provides an example of how students socially construct themselves in the school environment. What she found was that the schooling experiences of students were complex and operated on many levels, including class, gender, and race, in the formation of individual identities. Resistance and struggle for power within the school environment were clearly evident in the lives of these students.

Questions related to bias in the curriculum relate to questions of what is valid or legitimate knowledge. The experience and knowledge of some groups is validated while other groups are denied. "Through the school's curriculum, educators and students are provided with academic definitions of what counts as valid knowledge and how such knowledge should be produced and disseminated" (Dei, 1996, p.21). Curriculum and pedagogy have become sites for contesting the marginality of groups and expressing opposition to the traditional roles of schools. "Current calls for 'alternative pedagogies,' 'inclusive curriculum,' and 'representative school environments' must be understood as challenges to the hegemonic Euro-centred norms, values and ideas that characterize Canadian schools" (Dei, 1996, p. 22). Educators need to address these inequities by seriously examining alternate ideas and views and

identify sources that empower some students and marginalize others. Schools need to adopt goals and practices leading to inclusion of all students while oppositional forms of knowledge need to be given equal status.

The issues of race and racism are particularly important for minority students and need to be understood by schools as social constructs. These issues have profound significance for students and, therefore, need to be discussed in schools. Kelly's (1998) study shows how these issues are central in the day to day lives of Black students in Edmonton. The process of racialization, or giving raced meanings to social situations, is prominant in the identity formation of many Black students. Knowing who they are in a White dominated society includes differentiating themselves from those who are "different" and associating with others who are perceived as Black. The social construction of meaning for these youth involved growing up Black in a society dominated both historically and currently by White Eurocentric culture. Clearly these issues cannot be ignored by schools if we hope to create an environment of equality. Dei (1996), suggests that in order to understand how social difference is mediated in schools, we need a discursive framework of anti-racism education.

Anti-racism education may be defined as an action oriented strategy to address the dominant institutional and systemic issues within a multicultural society. The need for anti-racism education was first expressed by local community groups who challenged the Canadian state to live up to the ideals of democratic citizenship, social justice, equity, and fairness (Dei, 1996). By opening up a critical discourse on race, racism, and racialization of social groups, anti-racism education seeks to delve deeper into structural issues than did earlier forms of multicultural education. Anti-racism identifies race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as issues of cultural and ethnic variety. The historical evolution of multicultural society in Canada and its related processes are outlined in order to generate discussion and understanding of how current racialization operates in society. Anti-racism discourse targets all groups

involved in the process of education including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the larger community. All involved contribute to, and are shaped by, the society in which we live so are therefore all implicated in the educational process. Central to these relations is the power we have access to and the ways in which power relations play out in discussions about identity and social difference. Relative positions of power and privilege include recognition of the intersection of many different variables such as gender, race, and class but also overarching considerations such as the existence of White, male privilege and the structures that have led to the creation of these relationships. Teaching in an anti-racism framework involves recognizing our individual and collective strengths. As educators, we have to recognize our own difference in order to learn from each other. As a project of social transformation, anti-racism seeks to visualize a community based on commonalties within diversity (Dei, 1996).

Multicultural Discourse in Schools

Traditionally public schooling has been organized to maintain the status quo in society in terms of ideology, hierarchy, and power relations. Children have been taught about society from a position of White cultural dominance. Social problems were presented as the result of individual failings with little or no recognition of the role of societal structures. Children have also been taught to compete for top positions in society with no focus on ways to work together to improve their collective condition (Darder, 1991). This type of discourse has remained fairly constant over time and has so far done little to recognize that the language and discourse of many students and, in fact, large segments of Canadian society has changed. Discourse recognises a multiplicity of voices and the unruly nature of articulations (Tomlinson, 1991). However, the production of discourse in society is controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by certain procedures including the boundaries of the discourse and who gets to speak. Traditionally, the voices representing the interests of a White, male

dominanted society have set the boundaries and have had a disproportionate opportunity to speak. The unity of a discourse is based on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed (Foucault, 1972). In relation to schools, the space is constantly changing suggesting the need for discourse to adapt along with it. An appropriate unity of discourse in schools would reflect the interplay of the language and culture rules that make possible the appearance of a particular space in a particular time. That is, we need equal opportunity for all groups to define the boundaries of eductional discourse within a multicultural framework. Objects, or how we determine what can be said on a subject, make up the space of schools and need to reflect a changing multicultural society. School realities are shaped by discourse and a recognition of the ommision of a diversity of voices, in defining not only the guiding principles but also the specifics within subject areas, will be necessary in order to reshape the discourse. Within a particular subject area, groupings of statements may be considered in terms of their relations to each other. Statements chosen and their presentation are a reflection of cultural hegemony and need to be interpreted through an understanding of the knowledge of those who produced them. As the classroom opens up to diverse populations, statements made within it become more heterogeneous and need to be recognized in their interplay with existing discourse. One way to start this process of recognition might be to use themes within the classroom as a way to bring together diverse groups and create common ground from which to build.

The establishment of objects within a discourse is necessary in order to engage in discussions about it and the conditions of the complex group of relations that allow it to exist (Foucault, 1972). This seems to be the starting point for schools. To determine the objects that make up the various discourses, whether or not these are the appropriate objects, and what relations exist between them both now and in the past. This space then creates many possibilities for discourses and discursive relations. Discursive relations lie at the limit of discourse, much like the boundaries of culture, where culture

becomes identifiable yet problematic. These relations characterize discourse as a practice and allow us to discuss the constantly changing objects and their relations. The attempt here is not to classify objects as things but rather to show their dynamic, fluid qualities. Discourse then, like culture, is constantly reshaping itself into new and hybrid forms. In analyzing words within a discourse we can begin to see the problematic way in which they work within the curriculum and the classroom. We begin to see the signs of representation and the ways they symbolize particular meanings for some students and many possible alternate meanings for other students.

Traditional conservative educational discourses have pointed toward the purpose of education being to conserve the social and economic status quo through the perpetuation of institutional values and relationships that safeguard dominant power structures (Darder, 1991). Uniformity and consensus are necessary in order to create an unquestioning belief in the world view of the dominant society. Bowles and Gintes (1976) claim that the social hierarchy is not only maintained along lines of cognitive skills, but also according to behavioural traits that are related to social class. Schools produce and interpret knowledge that serves to silence those deemed to be different and fails to validate the daily lived experiences that shape students' lives. Classroom knowledge is often treated as an external body of information, independent of time and place (Giroux, 1981). Teaching in this paradigm is usually compartmentalized and presented as value free. Dei (1996), reminds us that teaching from this position can be very dangerous. Teaching from a position of knowledge, or belief that one's own reality is the only one worth speaking about diminishes other experiences and can be very disempowering. Anti-racism, as a discourse in schools can help us avoid these pitfalls.

Teaching from a belief in one's own position is what Paulo Freire refers to as banking. Knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable. Education is an exercise of domination designed to indoctrinate

students into a world of oppression. One in which they lack the critical thinking skills necessary to question their place in an unjust society. Dominant educational discourses have been presented as "regimes of truth", acting as an economy of power/knowledge to maintain dominant hegemony. Although this presentation provides some framework for analysis, it is too definitive (Gore, 1993). Power is not the sole property of the dominant classes and although many people, from both marginalized and dominant groups, may not fully understand how strucutres have operated to create our current power relations, all still have and exercise varying degrees of power. Problem posing education, using methods similar to anti-racism, provides an opportunity through dialogue, to work together to change the existing situation. Reflection provides an opportunity for all to begin to understand ones relations with the world. This consciousness can lead to transformation (Freire, 1993). Clearly banking style teaching is still prevalent in our schools and is effective in ensuring the continued existence of cultural hegemony that acts to ensure unequal relations in society. However, many groups and individuals are resisting this tendancy and have made positive inroads into changing these conditions.

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is based on the idea that the continued supremacy of a particular social group manifests itself through domination and intellectual and moral leadership (Darder, 1991). The reality of contemporary society is that ideological and cultural practices of dominant groups do have consequences for subordinated groups (Dei, 1996). Political power, cultural ideology, and pedagogy work together to ensure the domination of these subordinated groups. Ideological control is exercised through dominant beliefs, values, and social practices which are distributed through institutions such as schools, but its complexity goes beyond this to include the lived experiences of daily life (Giroux, 1981). Children of varying backgrounds belong to subcultures whose norms, values, and lifestyles differ from those of the dominant society which makes it difficult for them to cope with schools

and the requirements of a society that may be very new and unfamiliar to them (Darder, 1991). We need to begin to understand how knowledge has been organized along racial, ethnic, gender, and class lines and understand how and why certain groups have occupied the margins in Canadian society.

Race, as a social construct, has changed over time as has its use as a social discourse. These discourses have moved into the realms of education as well as general social policy. Both race and identity are based on social and historical relations that change providing differing meanings to our lives. These complex issues surrounding race, identity, and representation cannot be understood by looking simply at one discursive tradition (Apple, 1993). We need to study past struggles over race, class, gender, and national and international relations through different discourses and we need to encourage those past and current discourses as part of our discussions about education.

Discourses also need to be critically examined by allowing for open discussion within our educational system. Within the conservative discourse about education, we have recently heard calls for a return to tougher standards and discipline in schools (Apple, 1993). At a recent teacher's convention in Edmonton, a University of Alberta professor told an audience of 300 teachers that schools should simply be preparing children to take up their roles in society. He went on to say that since the 1960s, schools have become obsessed with trying to make everyone equal. What schools should do is pass on skills, attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations from one generation to the next. Schools "should not be expected to respond to individual needs, promote diversity, or improve self-esteem" (Unland, *The Edmonton Journal,* February 26 1999). The problem with this approach is, of course, that passing on attitudes and beliefs from one generation to the next means the attitudes of dominant cultures. Preparing to take up roles in society means that those who hold power positions in society will pass on those power privileges to the next generation. Equality is not a

luxury and if working toward it means that teaching is becoming an impossible profession then perhaps we need to change the way we teach. Traditional assimilationist schools have failed to provide fair and equal schooling for all children. More of the same is unlikely to result in successful educational practices.

Asian parents in British Columbia are also arguing for a return to the basics in an environment of heated debate over education (Wood, *Maclean's,* February 22 1999). This pattern of appeal for a return to traditional model schools can be seen in other parts of the country as well. The Surrey, BC group argues that their complaints have nothing to do with culture but rather their children's needs are not being met in the public school system. It appears, however, that the differences in the new traditional schools is not substantial and it remains to be seen if the results are more positive. What is clear is that schools in Canada are struggling to adapt to meet the needs of a diverse population and we have not yet reached a point of being successful. Some of the response to that is to return to a time when things appeared to work better. What is not taken into account by this approach is that society has changed dramatically since the original conception of traditional schools.

Apple (1993), also points out that there are problems with the discourse of Afrocentrism. Many Black students feel that only by centering on their personal historical experiences as a core of the curriculum will they be able to sustain their culture and identities. This approach may well be a necessary step toward inclusion and emancipation but is ultimately a limited perspective. The dominant approach to dealing with multiculturalism has been equally problematic in that it tends to essentialize groups and fails to recognize the importance of cultural struggles in the politics of identity. What is needed in both these approaches is an intervention into the exclusionary debates. Issues of race and identity are complex and cannot be separated into separate racial discourses.

Identity and Culture

Schools, such as the one in this study, have recognized that ideological and cultural dominance has had an effect on the academic success of minority students and are working to change that reality. As schools, particularly those in urban areas, are experiencing rapid changes in ethno-cultural diversity, it becomes increasingly important that we examine the issues highlighted by these changes. The immigration Act of 1976 marks the beginning of recent changes in immigration patterns that have led to our current cultural mix in schools. About two thirds of new Canadians now originate from the Third World (Kach & Kim, 1991). The 1981 census shows that 43.5% of the total population was of British origin and 28.9% were of French origin. Close to one third of the Canadian population is of neither British or French origin, a drastic shift in diversity in a relatively short time period. Schools need to recognize and adapt to this diversity as the knowledge that is represented in our schools is significant in determining how each of us perceives and represents who we are. The interrelationship between culture and identity in schools plays a meaningful role in reshaping identities.

Many students now feel ambivalent about their racial and/or cultural identity due to a number of factors (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). For many students, the ethnic component of their identities, that is, the cultural practices that can be traced back to another country, is rapidly disappearing. These students' ancestors arrived in Canada so long ago that where they came from is no longer relevant to them. Still others would identify themselves as mixed race, or as recent census data indicates, or as having no "race" at all. There are also those students who are struggling to define themselves as their lives cross over distinct cultural boundaries. Ien (1994), provides a good example of the struggles for identity that are often engaged in by those who are members of a diasporic community. Coming from Indonesia with Chinese ethnic heritage, she could not fully identify herself with either of those places as she had no sense of belonging

with either cultural group. Living in the West, she was continually called upon to explain why she could not speak Chinese. The instability of identity arises from the Third Space where cultural boundaries are crossed and new hybrid identities develop. Time and place informs the meanings of identity including providing new meanings to past cultural and ethnic identity. Individuals do of course have some control over this process of identification. In the words of Ien Ang "if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent,* I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent.* When and how is a matter of politics." (1994, p. 18).

Racial difference is the product of human interests, needs, desires, strategies, capacities, forms of organization, and forms of mobilization. Dynamic variables such as identity and inequality are subject to change within determinate contexts and are the basis for calls for school change based on cultural affiliation. These narrow limits placed on the demands for recognition of difference and diversity are being articulated in essentialist and exclusionary terms that ignore the variability of racial identity and the ways in which factors such as gender, class, and nation intersect. The consequence for education has been a fragmented political space in which meaningful dialogue over difference is severely limited and collective action across cultural boundaries is virtually nonexistent. Issues of racial identity and representation have been marginalized in schools, leaving unquestionned the power relations that determine how particular groups are presented. Often minorities do not have control over the images that are presented about them in schools and in larger society. Essentialist tendencies in literature treat social groups as homogeneous. Reductionist strategies often highlight schooling as a single cause of inequalities. What is needed is an approach that explores the political, cultural, and economic contexts in which all groups encounter each other in schools and society (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993).

Grossberg (1994), tells us that identity formation is now based on a weaker notion of difference which recognizes a stronger sense of otherness. The other exists in

its own place independent of any specific relation. Identities are never fixed and never fall into a fixed pattern. They are a result of the interplay of identity and identification and the different ways people participate in society. Giroux (1994), refers to this struggle as the relationship between democracy and culture on the one hand, and identity and the politics of representation on the other. We are struggling for a new way to articulate the relationship among identity, culture, and democracy. The challenge for schools then is to link the politics of culture to the practice of democracy. Within this politics it must be recognized that racist representations of the Other still exist along with a refusal to critically examine ethical and political relations within privileged sites of enunciation. New cultural boundaries are emerging crisscrossed with diversity and dominant strategies of representation. The relationships within these sites are complex dynamics of hierarchy, power, and struggle.

Student's sense of self emerges from the various regimes of representations and their respective politics that are presented to them. Meanings are produced through relations of power that narrate identities through history, social forms, and modes of ethical address that appear objective (Giroux, 1994). Students are surrounded by a barrage of images, sounds, television programs and texts that constantly represent a particular vision of identities within a particular ideology. A critical educational process must raise the questions regarding power and politics that are behind these representations and how they form identities. Student's sense of self also comes from the images they have of others. Students from minority cultures often assume or are given a position in the margins, particularly if those in positions of power, the teachers and administration, are predominantly white, middle class while the student population is much more diverse. The centre, both in society and the schools that reflect the larger context, continues to define the centre. Trinh (1995), points out that the centre does not have the right to grant power, rights, and privilege to others and that by accepting this unequal relation the margin gives credibility to the centre. As we begin to realize that the

centre also is a marginal position we begin to see potential for new relationships based more on principles of equality.

Relationships in schools need to begin from the recognition that differences exist between individuals and that culture is only a part of what forms an individual's identity. According to Pinar (1993), the concept of text as it relates to curriculum refers both to the actual piece of writing and to the larger social reality. In this context, text implies that human reality is fundamentally discursive. Language evolves from reflections on experiences and reconciling differences from earlier experiences including the historical. This gap between past and present experience creates the space for concepts such as race and difference to develop. Hall (1995) reminds us that concepts such as race always arise historically in articulation, constantly formed anew with other categories and divisions.

Bhabha (1995) suggests that cultural difference is the process of enunciation of culture as knowledgeable and relevant to the construction of systems of cultural identification. Culture emerges as a problem only at the significatory boundaries of cultures which are constantly fluctuating and changing shape. In schools we see evidence of these continually changing boundaries as immigration patterns change leading to the development of new, hybrid cultures and identities in the classroom. Added to this is the recent awareness of the hybrid nature of identities and culture. We see active struggle for representation of both identity and culture within schools as individuals make choices regarding how they wish to be perceived by others. In contrast to this, we see evidence of representation of the past in schools, particularly in the food, fairs and festivals approach to multiculturalism. These representations are often attempts to recreate the past and may not be true to their original forms and even less likely to represent current cultural practices in the country of their origin. In contrast to this essentialising approach, we need to view culture in the present as not being unitary but rather recognizing that a system of meaning needs the place of

utterance which includes struggles for representation. Difference in language leads to different meanings and ensures that meaning is never clear. Production of meaning requires more than an act of interpretation between speaker and listener. It also requires a Third Space which represents the general conditions of language and the unconscious relations that exist in the act of interpretation. This ensures that culture has no fixity and that identities are hybrid. Grossberg (1993), tells us that identities seem to exist in a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of unnatural boundaries. How secure you are in your position within that place and how much power you have to determine your postion is reflected in the stability or fragility of your identity.

Identity and Schools

The substance of culture resides in relations to external life processes. This view needs to recognize the role of ideology. "Culture cannot be fully understood, either in terms of itself or in terms of the so-called universal development of the mind. To ignore this is to make ideology the basic matter and to establish it firmly" (Giroux, 1983, p.22). Ideology can be defined as forms of consciousness that claim to represent generalizable interests that function to mask or conceal the social contradictions in society (Darder, 1991). Societal outcomes are represented as natural ones and tend to present a harmonious picture that conceals conflict. For example, the defense of multicultural policy becomes ideology when it represents a particular interest while masking other interests that inform the structure. Ideologies are embodied in social relations and this certainly holds true for schools. In terms of pedagogy, ideology relates to the ideas and practices through which consciousness is formed. Schools play a major role in the production of feelings, ideas, desires, and moral preferences and these ideologies then reproduce ideologies in society. This function of schools in the production, interpretation, and effectivity of meaning must be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship between culture and power (Giroux, 1983). That is, ideology

should serve as a tool of investigation into relations and not as pointing deterministically toward domination in schools. As we have seen, all people have power and can exercise resistance in many ways.

Educators need to understand how the dominant culture structures ideology and produces social practices in schools, for the purpose of shattering existing power relationships and social arrangements (Darder, 1991). The theory of cultural hegemony is important to understanding these relationships. Hegemony refers to a form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed through institutions such as schools. It refers to a complex form of control which includes the lived experiences of daily life. Hegemonic control is exercised through discourse and leads to institutionalized social relations of power that tend to privilege students from dominant cultures over students from subordinate cultures. However, discourse is continually changing based on the interplay of power and culture. As cultural groups and individuals become increasingly aware of power relations and ideological control, resistance and alternate hegemonies begin to play a greater role. Added to this is the arrival of immigrants from places where different forms of hegemonic control may have been evident. The process of familiarizing themselves with the hegemonic discourse in Canadian schools may lead to transformed meanings. People not only interpret, but add their own meanings to new encounters. Although the idea of hegemony is important in understanding the unequal power relationships in schools, we also need to recognize that most things people say and do are not neatly calculated nor is the long term significance of much that is transacted on a daily basis clear to the participants in those transactions (Larson, 1997). Discourses are transformed by subordinated groups as is dominant hegemony.

Hegemony and ideology do also manifest themselves in the curriculum. The content of curriculum is constituted by the knowledge that is recognized as legitimate by those making curricular decisions (Darder, 1991). These decisions embrace the values,

attitudes, and biases within the educational discourse that is dominant in society. Giroux (1983), identifies ways in which hegemony is realized through the curriculum beginning with the selection of cultural values and materials deemed socially legitimate. Cultural content is categorized as superior and inferior through its inclusion and representation. School and classroom relationships are determined and legitimated through curriculum presentation. As well, distribution of and access to different types of culture and knowledge by different social classes and gender groups is commonly controlled through the curriculum. The dominant culture frequently uses hegemonic control to oppress subordinate groups' culture and language (Darder, 1991).

In schools, identities are constructed and expressed through representation. Curriculum is one significant site of negotiation where students begin to see themselves in relation to others, particularly the dominant group (Pinar, 1993). This not only creates individual identities but contributes to overall group identity. In understanding the effects of curriculum we need to consider the relationship between knowledge and ourselves. The present curriculum often denies role models to non-European students and denies self-understandings to white students as well. As Codjoe (1997) notes, the curriculum in Alberta's schools is at odds with the experiences, backgrounds, hopes, and wishes of many Black students. Marginality of these students within the school system has created a situation in which Black students lack any sense of identification and connectedness to school. All students are interrelated and all histories, even those denied, have contributed to who we are today. When we fail to see how culture is implicated in curriculum we misunderstand who we are as racialized, gendered, historical and political creatures. This leads to lack of understanding of our changing identities and the benefits of reflection on how we mold and shape one another. Our experiences, although unique, are inseparable from those whose history we all share.

Although it is important to note that schools are not the only site where children's identities are developed and from where they receive often contradictory and

confusing information, it is an important part of that process. School is a training ground where students are taught shared values, practices, and a sense of community designed to commit them to a particular discourse. This discourse then, directs our experience toward recognizing and interpreting events in particular ways. When information is conflicting for students, decisions have to be made on how to interpret events. A recent study done in Australia highlighted the contradictory images of "race" that students often receive in schools and at home (Rizvi, 1993). The study explored the ways in which children construct their ideas of racial difference and how these ideas are socially organized through pedagogy and the curriculum. Popular forms of racism are produced, maintained, challenged, and rearticulated in and through ideology with schools being one significant site of this practice. The ideology of popular racism is historically constituted and, although constantly reforming itself, leads to collective practice in thinking about relations. These relations are reflected in curriculum. Rizvi's study showed that children make sense of the contradictory racial messages they receive in a variety of ways. As they grow older, they begin to think and act through more complex stereotypes and begin to feel more comfortable in racially segregated groups. Discourse leads to talk of "us" and "them" reinforcing ethnic differentiation. Children often object to these images and practices but do not understand how and why they have developed. They lack the critical skills to imagine other alternatives. This particular study highlights the necessity of reading schools as dynamic and complex institutions with often contradictory messages for students to sort out.

These research findings are supported by Alberta based studies that highlight the ways in which students construct their ideas of racial difference in schools (Kelly, 1998; Codjoe, 1997). Black students often had to content with, and try to overcome, many obstacles and racialized barriers in schools. All of these students experienced racism and racist attitudes in schools. The teaching process can lead to Black students despising their own culture which in turn often results in lack of initiative and school

failure. Many feel there is no use complaining to authorities as they believe that most teachers and administrators are themselves racist. Negative societal labelling and stereotyping are other factors apparent in schools. Codjoe (1997), concludes that the current system of schooling and education has to be radically transformed in order to reverse the inferiorization of Black youths by the historically Euro-centered school system.

Relationships in Schools

Teachers' attitudes toward diversity are reflected in the expectations teachers have of children in their classrooms. The BLAC Report on Education (1994), states that, "Low teacher expectations is one of the greatest barriers facing Black learners". Where children are perceived to be bright and articulate, they tend to fulfill the teacher's expectation of success. If the teacher perceives a child to be slow and unmotivated, that child will likely reproduce the behaviors expected of them . Furthermore, those who perceive themselves to be at the bottom are more influenced by teacher expectations than those at who are successful in school (Darder, 1991). Teacher expectations have been shown to be shaped by a number of factors. The prevailing social attitudes associated with race, class structure and political ideology are particularly influential on those teachers whose experiences with other cultures have been limited. Specific pedagogical theories, conceptual frameworks, and practices that are the accepted models of teaching shape teachers views of those students who come from cultures where other methods are more widely used. Testing, tracking and certain forms of writing all fall into this category. Finally, a teacher's personal experiences related to race, culture, social class, and education all affect how one views the performance expectations of their students (Darder, 1991).

Teacher expectations tend to also affect the amount of attention given to each student in the classroom. Teachers report they spend more time preparing for college track classes than they do for general or business classes (Darder, 1991). Expectations

and the resulting attention given to students greatly influences their level of achievement in the classroom. Whether consciously or unconsciously, teachers tend to reinforce the social structures of dominance that function to suppress the achievements of many minority culture students. Teachers are often guided by ideological principles of how education should be provided (Apple, 1990). From these perspectives, educators determine ways to order and give meaning to their own activity. Knowledge to be passed on and symbols used are selected and distributed by schools based on accepted principles.

The way particular ideologies are represented in schools is reflected in the language and linguistic codes that are used, particularly in relation to students. Although we often believe our language to be neutral it is biased toward personal backgrounds and experiences. Through these perspectives, we label and place value on our own actions and the actions of those around us. In this way we differentiate students according to their perceived abilities based on our own cultural values. Power and the ability to define legitimate knowledge is exercised in schools and continues to reproduce and legitimate inequalities. Interests in educating the whole child has shifted the focus from strictly academic areas but does not decrease the potential for stratification within schools. The range of possibilities for student identities is opened up but with little effort directed toward equality. Opportunities still exist for teachers to sort students into categories that affect their achievement in all areas. The power to control vision, perspectives and language used continues to stratify and define relationships.

At the heart of education are curricular decisions that determine what skills, attitudes, and knowledge are passed on to children in schools. Central to these decisions is the role of teachers who are closest to students (Phuntsog, 1995). As we are aware, the population of teachers in Canada remains predominantly white, middle class while the student population is rapidly becoming more diverse. Although it is

crucial to cultivate a sense of social justice in the training of new teachers, this alone does not address the problems created by the existing cultural relations in schools. Teachers bring to the profession a particular perspective on culture and race which has been formed on the basis of their unique life experiences and vested interests. Often this includes the belief that race does not make a difference (Sleeter, 1993; Bollin & Finkel, 1995). Examining and changing personal beliefs requires much reflection, understanding and desire to change. Although many teachers are prepared to engage in this process, many more are not aware of the need to address these concerns. Teacher education programs are beginning to recognize and address these issues but are limited in their ability to change personal beliefs. Curriculum integration across several courses can be effective in preparing preservice teachers for diversity (Bollin & Finkel, 1995).

White privilege tends to limit what white people are capable of seeing in themselves. If white privilege is all we have known and our experience with the lives of minority cultures is limited then the whole structure we live within prevents us from seeing beyond and understanding the viewpoints of others. If we consider that racism in schools is also in part a structural problem with white people in most positions of power and privilege then it is difficult to think we can make real changes solely by cultivating a more sensitive white teaching population. White, male power and privilege as a rationale for dominance in society needs to be questionned (Dei, 1996). Sleeter (1993), suggests we need to populate the teaching force with people who have diverse world views and alternate discursive fields of reference. Educators with diverse ideologies and experiences are more likely to be able to critique the existing situation of unequal power positions and engage in activities that truly challenge racism in schools. By elevating the status of minority discourse, the experiences of teachers and students who come from diverse backgrounds can be validated. Multicultural teacher education is necessary but much more effective when the experiences of minority cultures are

equally represented in the grouping. All teachers need to work collectively with local cultural communities where mutual learning can occur.

Although it is necessary to encourage a more diverse teaching population, others argue that teacher education programs can do a better job of preparing existing students for teaching. Codjoe's (1997) study confirms this notion in that he found many Black students (approximately half his study group) had experienced positve and supportive teachers. Successful White teachers of minority students were ones who were able to bring out the best in their students. His findings also point to the importance of teachers learning more about their minority students' families and experiences. The solutions are not monolithic and involve developing questions and courses of action that are valid for specific circumstances and communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). Learning from teaching should be regarded as the primary task of teacher education with emphasis on carrying out this ideal throughout one's teaching career. In this approach, teachers are assumed to have the authority to construct knowledge about teaching and their research becomes a significant part of a redefined knowledge base for teaching. Teachers have argued that conducting research is a powerful way to understand how they and their students construct and reconstruct the teaching and learning that occurs in their classrooms and schools. Inquiry stimulates, intensifies, and illuminates changes in practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Through personal research, teachers can address cultural diversity by making knowledge, difference, and reform problematic. Ideologies and the historical reasons behind current educational practices can be critically examined and understood.

McCall (1995), suggests that it is extremely important for preservice teachers to understand their own backgrounds as they interact with multicultural ideas. Teacher education programs need to look at possible relationships between these backgrounds, views of multicultural education, and classroom practices. Resistance to multicultural teaching needs to be addressed in terms of identifying the underlying reasons and

building positive strategies for success. Birrell (1995), adds that prospective teachers must explore their own ethnic histories in order to better understand how groups have become marginalized and stratified within society. Teachers who are more secure in their own cultural identities may better develop the needed strength, cultural knowledge, and pedagogical skills needed to engage diversity in ways that promote academic achievement and ethnic identities in schools.

All students, independent of difference, mediate and express their sense of time, place, and history, and their uncertain interactions with each other, within the school environment (Giroux, 1989). Students make sense of their lives and schools through voice, which Giroux (1988), defines as the discourses available to us to make us understood and listened to as participants in the world. The formal curriculum as well as the structuring of classroom relations often places voices and representations of dominant cultural groups in more privileged positions than others. Student voice is intimately related to language with language being developed through historical context that shapes its values. Language is the tool that has to be engaged in the struggle for voice in the classroom. Of consideration then, is not only the language the student comes to school with, but also the ways in which language shapes the student within the school environment. The language used in schools constructs particular norms and forms of meaning that may be contradictory to the student's own cultural beliefs.

The complex processes involved in the development of student voice in the classroom are made increasingly complicated by the changing populations in schools. Teachers and students together sustain, resist, or accommodate languages, ideologies, social processes, and myths within relations of power. Teachers are often not aware of how these are represented in the classroom and how these create a particular discourse that presents dominant cultural views to students. Teachers need to be aware of the importance of student voice and the ways in which the language of dominant ideologies

are manifested in school curricula and how they are produced and circulated in schools (Giroux, 1989).

Also important in the development of student voice is an understanding of representation in texts. Through representations of race, difference, and identity, the curriculum communicates images of who we are as individuals (Pinar, 1993). Teachers and students need to work toward deconstruction of meanings and the ways material is used in school curriculum material. The monocultural content of the school curriculum and the expectations of teachers for Black and minority students have been established as major barriers to educational achievement and equality (King, 1993). Students respond differently to readings of texts based on past histories, experiences and languages. An understanding of these individual differences can help students produce positive meanings that legitimate their particular values and lifestyles. Of particular importance in the struggle for representation in the classroom is the development of voice in minority students (Darder, 1991). Dei (1996), also points to this issue as a role for anti-racism education. He states that we need to identify what voices, opinions, and experiences are being heard and note who is being silenced and how. The control of power and the legitimation of certain student discourses tends to favour white, middle class students. Students with minority culture backgrounds are more often silenced by their teachers. Being unable to develop their voice they often also do not develop the necessary critical skills needed to transform their current social situation and have limited possibilities for democratic participation later in life. All students need to understand their world as historically situated and linked to all those around them in order to be able to enter into dialogue with those who are perceived to be different.

Parent and Community Relations

The importance of involving families and communities in the formal education of children is now commonly understood to be an important factor in the academic success of students. In fact, Codjoe's (1997) study found parent support and

encouragement to be the most important factor in school success. Of particular relevance are students who are deemed to be at risk for economic, social or cultural reasons. Often schools find it more difficult to reach families of these students and find ways to involve them in the school in meaningful roles. Swap (1993), refers to recent studies that show that many students are educationally disadvantaged and that these deficiencies show up later in poor life chances for employment, income, and political and social participation. She goes on to say that children of minority background, recent immigrants, and children living below the poverty line are more likely to experience low academic achievement and high dropout rates. As these segments of the population increase, so does the challenge to schools to find better ways to educate all children.

Swap (1993), outlines studies that show how parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved in meaningful ways, children do better in school. Parent involvement seems to lead to higher self esteem, fewer behaviour problems, and better school attendance. What also is apparent is the importance of school success to parents of all backgrounds and economic levels. Darder (1991), concurs that parents of minority group children often actively encourage, urge, support, and struggle for their children to get an education. Historically, public education has provided hope for improved lives for many minority groups. Despite many efforts by parents and communities, many of these students as well as those living in poverty continue to fall through the cracks. Traditionally students have had to shoulder the responsibility for their own academic failure but we are now beginning to realize that many other factors perpetuate inequities, including level of parent involvement.

The main determinant in parent participation seems to be school policies and teacher practices that encourage involvement. However, where backgrounds are particularly diverse, policies and practices need to reflect this diversity. Berger (1995), highlights the importance of schools and communities working together to support

families and children. Policies that enable all parents, regardless of educational background, to be involved are most successful. Teachers who ask parents to conduct learning activities at home, such as reading aloud, asking children about their day at school, visiting the classroom, and going to the library are most successful at soliciting parent involvement. Those teachers who are least successful in this area are those who stereotype less educated, single parent or low income families and as a result do not put the necessary effort into building bridges with the home. The teacher needs to play many roles that are central to parent involvement including facilitator, teacher, counselor, communicator, interpreter, and friend. Overcoming barriers to participation, such as changing demographics, school norms that do not support participation, limited resources, and lack of information, will require commitment and initiative by teachers as well as the support of the administration.

Dei (1996), also argues for effective processes that encourage communication and interaction with parents and community groups. Parents need to share in vital decision making processes in meaningful ways. They need to be involved in the administrative control of the school along with administrators, teachers, and students. Parents also need to be involved in rewriting school curriculum to ensure all viewpoints are represented. As well, support needs to be provided for families dealing with racism and poverty that affect the outcomes of schooling. Where barriers to participation for parents exist, the school needs to take the necessary steps to eliminate those obstacles and encourage involvement.

ISSUES OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS

The Challenge for Schools

As has been noted, structures do exist in schools that attempt to reproduce dominant cultural, political, and economic ideologies. The existence and quality of ESL programs can been seen as one of these structures. Where ESL programs do not exist in spite of need, clearly we are creating obstacles for minority students. Learning English in a sink-or-swim environment leaves many ESL students unable to keep up, ultimately reinforcing current societal power relations. Many Canadian schools are, however, struggling to meet the second language and settlement needs of a growing number of immigrant and refugee children along with those Canadian born children whose first language is not English. Often these needs have to be addressed with reduced levels of funding and staff resources. In a study by Flaherty & Woods (1992), provincial policy for ESL students in Alberta specifically highlights the focus on the responsibilities of the school boards and the province. Funding for ESL students is provided for a maximum of three years and does not include Canadian born ESL students. Even for those ESL students for whom funding is provided, the monies generally fall short of actual program costs. Some school boards do not provide ESL programs for a variety of school specific reasons including lack of staff, funding, facilities, parental refusal of the program, and lack of resources to identify and assess student needs. As a result, many ESL students receive most of their instruction from regular classroom teachers, many of whom have no specialized training in this area (Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994).

School boards are also often concerned with ways to deal with the continuous, unpredictable increases in students requiring ESL support, lack of program effectiveness, and funding difficulties stemming from lack of federal or provincial government support (Flaherty & Woods, 1992). Many school boards rate the effectiveness of their ESL programs as less than satisfactory due primarily to

inadequate funding while recognizing the need to address these concerns to avoid future social problems. By understanding the needs of new families and welcoming them into Canadian society with appropriate programs and services, we can prevent social problems and begin to work toward understanding and tolerance. Appropriate policies and support at all levels is necessary to meet the needs of ESL students.

Educational practice in ESL needs special consideration for a variety of reasons. Language acquisition is not only related to cognitive and linguistic development, but also to a child's cultural adaptation to society at large as well as to the culture of the school. As language and culture are closely related, so are the specific cultural values of the school related to academic achievement. Students' sense of self develops through understandings within the school environment. The unspoken rules of the classroom and playground are often difficult to understand and accept. If it becomes clear to the child that their personal position is marginal they may not be willing to engage with others. Many ESL children do appear to become fluent in English very quickly but at the same time develop problems related to cognition and academic success. This may be based on Cummin's (1994) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), where language is learned and used in highly contextualized oral interactive settings, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), where language is used to explore and expand abstract concepts in classroom settings. As CALP is related to cognitive development, it can take many years to develop, unlike BICS which is often developed quickly particularly by children with an outgoing, social nature and are secure in their surroundings. There are a wide range of differences in the cognitive and social adaptation of children to new surroundings, suggesting the challenges for ESL teaching are great. The complex set of linguistic, cultural, social, and political factors involved demands a broad range of dynamic responses leading toward appropriate attitudes, strategies, and opportunities (Flaherty & Woods, 1992).

Becoming proficient in English for second language learners is extremely important as it is related to academic achievement in all areas of schooling. Ways of determining language proficiency are inadequate as are many existing approaches to teaching for language proficiency. It is now generally believed that a communicative approach to teaching better reflects the nature of language proficiency and that this approach has to incorporate cultural considerations. We also know that proficiency in first language (L1) is related to the development of L2 proficiency. Testing for language proficiency, however, continues to be an obstacle to second language learning. It is often assumed that poor performance in L2 communication is a function of deficient cognitive abilities, which in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for the student. It is also often assumed that the development of superficial communication skills means that the student is fluent in English. This also causes problems for the student because once they have been deemed to be proficient in English they are expected to do well academically. If they do not, language proficiency is not considered to be a cause but rather cultural or cognitive deficiencies are often put forth as explanations (Cummins, 1984). One of the inadequacies in language testing, as put forth by Oller, seems to be a lack of consideration of the global dimension in language proficiency (Cummins, 1984). Language skill pervades every area of the school curriculum in ways that are stronger than was originally considered by curriculum writers or testers.

Academic and cognitive variables are strongly related to the four general language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. What is also clear is that conversational aspects of proficiency are unrelated to academic and cognitive performance. Failure to take account of these distinct dimensions of language proficiency has often resulted in underestimating children's academic potential (Cummins, 1984). A theoretical framework for language proficiency that focuses on this distinction is put forth by Cummins (1984). In this framework the BICS/CALP distinction is maintained with a stronger focus on the contextual and cognitive aspects

underlying language performance. Language proficiency is conceptualized along two continuums. The first continuum relates to the range of contextual support available for expressing and receiving meaning. At one end is context-embedded communication where participants can actively negotiate meaning by providing feedback on whether or not the message has been understood and a number of situational cues are available to assist with meaning. At the other end is context-reduced communication that relies primarily on linguistic cues for meaning and requires knowledge of the language itself in order for successful interpretation. The other continuum consists of communicative tasks and activities that range from cognitively demanding to cognitively undemanding. Studies have shown that young children's early thought processes and use of language develop within meaningful context of fairly immediate goals, intentions, and familiar patterns of events. Thinking and language that move beyond the bounds of meaningful interpersonal context make entirely different demands on the individual. Also important to consider is that context has a cultural dimension. Providing context for particular words may give meaning, but the meaning might not make sense based on prior cultural experience. The child's culture, then, needs to inform the context.

It has also been suggested that first and second language academic skills are related and interdependent. There is a common underlying proficiency that will transfer from first language to second language given the proper conditions. As proficiency develops in first language, this proficiency will transfer provided there is adequate exposure to second language and motivation to learn. Common cross-lingual proficiencies underlie the surface manifestations of both languages. This suggests the importance of promoting first language conceptual skills, particularly for minority students who may be experiencing academic difficulties, as a way to build overall language proficiency (Cummins, 1984).

Another factor related to language acquisition is individual differences. Active use of the target language is considered to be important, therefore communicative

interaction needs to be emphasized. Incorporated here is the notion of comprehensible input and use of both oral and written language (Swain, 1986). Quantity and quality of input directly affect the amount of comprehensible input that learners receive and the amount of comprehensible output they send. Learner attributes such as age, cognitive abilities, L1 literacy, personality, personal confidence, and motivation interact with input to determine what will actually be understood by the learner. Another factor may be the child's cultural background. For example, those coming from oral cultural traditions may not place the same emphasis on motivation to learn writing skills. We also have seen that the interplay of identity and identification affect the ways in which people participate in society. In a democratic learning environment where students feel a sense of equality there may be more willingness to engage new language learning. Learners' confidence in their identity and ability to learn is a centrally important attribute and one that is greatly influenced by the teacher. When student's identities are rejected, particularly through punishment for use of native language, students are forced to make a choice between cultures. This choice is often traumatic and may interfere with learning of both L1 and L2 languages. For the same reason, students need to be able to relate what they are learning to their prior experiences in order to validate those experiences. Student's ideas, purposes, and dreams need to be integrated into language teaching in order to foster a necessary sense of community with the school environment. ESL students arrive at school with a rich background of cultural identities and language abilities. Using these resources can not only enhance the student's individual learning, but also enrich the experiences of all children (Cummins, 1994).

Discourse in Second Language Learning

The processes involved in producing and comprehending discourse need to be considered when analyzing the many linguistic backgrounds that exist in schools with high ESL populations. As was noted earlier, the production of discourse in society is controlled by certain procedures including the boundaries of discourse and who gets to

speak. Even in schools with a lot of cultural diversity, the voices that have traditionally been dominant continue to be dominant. At the school where this action research takes place, the unity of this discourse is beginning to be questioned. New objects emerge and discourse is constantly transformed. Fine (1988), highlights the importance of the word "process" in second language discourse as discourse is produced for other people and is influenced by other discursive practices. The steps involved in producing and comprehending discourse are related to patterning of the discourse and must be understood in order to comprehend the language. In a linguistically diverse environment this means also taking into consideration the influence of many languages and the coming together of different discourses.

Most ESL teaching has specific objectives with limited time to achieve them. Developing efficient methods and materials will be enhanced by starting from an understanding of the psychological processes the second language learner engages in order to sort out what is being presented to them. Also crucial to second language discourse is the culture and place of utterance of the second language. The student is learning a new language along with how to use the language in appropriate situations. Differences between cultures affect how things are said, who should speak to whom and how they should be addressed, and how communication changes based on the situation. Differences also exist between oral and written language in terms of their patterning and when and how to use them. Formal and informal modes of written language need to be understood when determining what type of language to use. All types of language behavior involves both production and comprehension. Understanding how the second language learner both produces meaning through discourse and comprehends what is presented is important when considering second language teaching (Fine, 1988).

Discourse operates as units of communication in the classroom and as an indicator of production and comprehension processes. How language is used

appropriately in particular situations is the primary goal of second language teaching. In the early stages, correct grammar and sounds are stressed, while later on the appropriateness of saying particular things in certain situations is stressed. It is at this later stage, the acquisition of appropriate comprehension and production, that discourse becomes increasingly important. Here we need to understand the ordering and integration of specific cognitive processes of the second language learner to best understand how second language is acquired. One consideration is the situation of the language use based on the speaker's knowledge of similar situations. If the speaker comes from a culture that applies different rules to that situation it may take longer for them to recognize and adapt to the differences. Another influence on discourse patterns is that of context of the discourse. Second language speakers must consider content of what is said and the potential meanings it holds. Over time the speaker learns the possible meanings for the new culture and which choice is most appropriate for the situation (Fine, 1988).

The patterning of conversation is also influential in discourse as it is conversation that is most used in second language teaching. Content of utterances in conversation is affected by power relations between speakers and the amount of information available to the listener. Teachers need to recognize how power plays out within different cultural settings as this may affect how a child is willing to respond in class. In second language learning, information needs to be provided on the meaning of various intonation, accents on certain words, social structure, and relationships between words. The norms for understanding in a particular situation are set by the cultural place and are affected by cultural knowledge. Teachers need to adapt their language to the limited social knowledge of students who are in a new environment. On the other hand, students need exposure to expanded knowledge forms that are relevant to their new environment. This suggests there is a delicate balance needed between

linguistic systems, knowledge systems, and the interactive processes in the acquisition of a second language.

Fine (1988), summarizes by saying that the learning of second language discourse is the result of skills and patterning from several sources. New structures must be learned in order to organize content that might never have been relevant in the student's first language and culture. The content may derive from meanings found in one culture but not in another. Social facts and linguistic patterns must be organized and translated into a form that is meaningful to the student. Second language learning involves cognitive processes and social patterning that affects discourse patterns, meaning that actual language to be learned is only part of what needs to be acquired. Understanding of the situation and context must also be obtained through prior knowledge and interpretation.

Culture and ESL Learning

Richards (1988), views language as a tool for the creation of social relationships which is a dynamic process with no fixed starting point. Meaning is derived through negotiation by talking to one another, therefore the study of conversational interaction should shed some light on language behavior. Competence in conversation can be broken into three parts. Grammatical competence is the knowledge of the rules used to create sentences as linguistic units for the coding of intended meaning. Illocutionary competence refers to our knowledge of how sentences are used to create speech acts such as requests, apologies, and denials. Social competence is our knowledge of how these rules can be applied to achieve and maintain social goals and interpersonal relationships. Social competence becomes challenging when crossing cultural boundaries as cultural norms may vary widely from one culture to another. Realization of social competence in a new culture may be difficult as the mechanisms for realizing this competence are often subtle. Different conversational conventions can lead to misunderstandings in a cross cultural setting.

A look at conversation can shed some light on the reasons behind these misunderstandings beginning with the speaker's intent. Culture is a factor in determining what is meant by a particular utterance. For example, the question "how are you?" in North America is a conversational opener rather than an inquiry into one's health. An understanding of culture is necessary in order to understand the intent of the speaker. The amount of talking people engage in is also often a function of culture. In North America, talking is considered a natural way of getting to know someone, while in Japan, silence is valued particularly upon meeting for the first time. The roles people adopt in conversation need to be sorted out based on perceptions people have regarding status and respect for the other person. One of the roles in conversation has to do with how one presents oneself and is different according to cultural norms regarding how much information should be given. Roles relating to status include display, or how much children or adults display their abilities before a spectator. How that display is perceived cross culturally needs to be considered when reflecting on conversation in classrooms. In classroom interactions, the distance or affiliation between teacher and student will impact the atmosphere of politeness, again depending on the cultural norms of the speakers. The devices used to determine the degree of politeness required of the situation may be applied inappropriately leading to misinterpretation of intent and even cultural stereotyping. Finally, the overall ethos or character of a culture needs to be considered. Second language learners need to know how speech acts play out in conversation and which have specific conversational restrictions. Often conversational behavior appears confusing to second language learners when attempts are made to transfer rules from one language to another (Richards, 1988).

Alptekin (1988), talks about the significance of cultural domination in language learning. Unfavorable language learning situations exist where the language to be learned is spoken by a dominant group while language learners are in subordinate situations. Often ESL students have recently arrived from another country where

Anglo-American dominance is a factor. These students may have been shaped by images presented in their country of origin of what Canada is like. The consciousness they arrived with may be shattered after a period of time when they realize the enhanced images they had do not fit with the reality they are experiencing. Opportunities to learn English may be limited by limited social contact with speakers of English. Without the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with English speakers, many turn to familiar cultural groups for social interaction. Beyond limited opportunities, many ESL learners feel that often native speakers of English do not try to comprehend the ways of others. The ethnocentric belief in the social and material aspects of North American culture that is often encountered leads many foreign students away from interactions outside their cultural group. When cultural practice leads to a belief that ones own norms and values are in fact universal, we present cultural issues in the classroom according to our political and ideological beliefs that may not reflect those of the students. It is important, though, to teach students some of these values and practices at a critical and comparative level so they may understand and engage with the society around them. As participants in interactions gain more and more information about each other, social distance between language groups can be decreased.

Relationships and Processes

Language use in the home and at school greatly affect the learner's ability to acquire language. Children learn language through active engagement with the world around them. Knowledge about the world develops along with language acquisition. As children learn first language they ask questions, encounter problems and develop solutions, often with the support of adults. At home, most children experience a reciprocal form of interaction in which meanings are negotiated, not unilaterally imposed. Parents and siblings often treat children as equal partners in conversation, encouraging them to take initiative and extend their knowledge. These patterns of interaction are dramatically altered when children enter the school environment. In the

school, few exchanges with teachers are initiated by children, questions are asked much more infrequently, and more often the child is asked to display their knowledge to the teacher (Cummins, 1984).

Teachers are often more concerned with following their lesson plan, as they have a set curriculum that needs to be taught, than accepting and extending topics and information offered by the child. Instruction tends to be designed to impart knowledge on the child or checking on their existing knowledge base of the subject. Often the child's contribution is important only as it relates to the lesson at hand, not as a way to discover what the child really has to share. Not enough time is spent getting to know the child or sharing cultural backgrounds and feelings amongst classmates. Clair (1995), in her research involving mainstream classroom teachers and their ability to teach ESL students, found there was inadequate teacher preparation and nonexistent or inappropriate professional development. Teachers were learning primarily on the job. She also found that teachers tend to look for quick fixes with little understanding of the underlying complex educational problems. Mainstream teachers tend to lack understanding of second language acquisition and the necessary attitudes which would facilitate ESL student achievement.

Comparisons between home and school environments show that providing opportunities for active exploration and discussions of challenging problems will lead to more successful language acquisition. Where this is lacking, children tend to become focused on the correctness of the formal features of language and their motivation to carry out academic tasks is largely extrinsic. Where interactions between adults and children are reciprocal, learning objectives tend to be focused on process rather than content and tend to engage higher levels of cognitive processing than does factual recall. In second language acquisition this interaction with target language users is crucial for comprehension. Ideal interaction involves a message that is understandable by the individual second language learner, is interesting and relevant, and is given in

quantities that are appropriate to the level of second language proficiency. Learners must be able to see the connections between language forms and their functions. This will involve the previous experiences of the individual and their cognitive ability to interpret the meanings presented (Cummins, 1984).

Opportunities for active exploration are provided through approaches such as whole language and process writing. Studies of ESL students using process writing have shown growth in a number of areas. Students have developed a sense of audience, an increased confidence in their own personal style and decision-making capability, and heightened realization of the power in language and their ability to manipulate it to achieve desired meanings (Hall, 1993). Writing expertise in first language and ESL proficiency have been shown to be independent of each other, that is, they are psychologically distinct abilities. The cognitive abilities involved in writing expertise include problem-solving strategies, attention to complex aspects of writing while making decisions, and the quality of content and discourse organization in composition. Greater proficiency in second language leads to production of more effective texts, but does not lead to qualitative changes in the thinking process used for writing. Increasing L2 proficiency will not affect the central cognitive ability of writing expertise. Cummins (1984), says a strong relationship may be developed between skills in L1 and skills in L2 as a result of more generalized proficiency to handle cognitively demanding context-reduced language tasks.

Hall (1993) has shown that ESL children's abilities are like those of L1 writers. They can compose before they have mastered the conventions of English such as pronunciation and capitalization. They tend to use whatever knowledge they possess to form hypotheses about written English which may draw on L1 expertise and can take audience feedback into account. They will also represent their meaning in pictorial form where necessary. Studies of ESL children coupled with studies of professional writers provides evidence that people do not need to practice the subskills of written language,

but need to orchestrate all subsystems during any given language event. This fits with the current emphasis on the communicative approach as process writing applies these same principles. A study by de la Luz Reyes (1991), points to a further consideration. Implementation of instructional approaches need to consider the cultural, social, and linguistic needs of the learners. For example, the Hispanic students in her study have high regard for teachers as authority figures and looked to them for direct instructional intervention. Their personal attachment to the teacher and their need for social interaction before getting into school tasks lead to difficulties in areas such as process writing where the teacher's role was more in the background and rules for writing were not completely clear. Teachers need to adapt the writing process to individual needs that allow students to experience the possibilities for writing within their own context. This whole language approach ensures language is functional and purposeful and can be used to meet their needs.

Active exploration of language in classrooms needs to also consider that there are multiple levels of ability and language skills within an ESL classroom. These ability levels can generally be categorized into three groups (Bilash, 1998). There is usually a group of students who can work independently, interpreting instructions and expectations. The middle group of students need clear instructions, a concise breakdown of steps of the task, and adequate learning supports in order to complete assignments. The third group need even more structure, explanation, guidance, time, and assistance. Although these groupings can help in terms of providing instructions, the many factors that determine ability level need to considered when developing teaching strategies. Teachers need to understand students' backgrounds and how various factors play out in the classroom. As teachers' attitudes toward diversity tend to be reflected in the expectations they have of students we need to caution against the viewing of multiple levels of ability in the classroom as indicators of future success.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

ACTION RESEARCH

Action research was chosen as a methodology for this project as the staff involved, particularly the Assistant Principal, felt it offered opportunities to explore and understand the learning needs of the school's diverse student population. It allowed them to develop their own research questions that were directly relevant to their individual classroom practices. As well, action research could help them discover discrepancies between theory and practice, that is, the differences between what they believed about culture and teaching ESL students and what they were actually doing. Their hope was to develop strategies and specific courses of action that would enable them to better meet the needs of ESL students. The Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, was interested in action research as it held the potential to provide understandings that could be useful in teacher education programs.

What is Action Research?

According to Kemmis and McTaggart, action research is

> a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The origin of this type of research is generally traced to Kurt Lewin and his associates whose experiments in social science in the 1930s showed how democratic participation could increase worker cooperation and productivity (Adelman, 1993). Action research provided the method for developing social relationships of groups and between groups to sustain positive communication. Group members develop powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action based on their collective research of individual problems. Action research then, must involve the active participation of those who have to carry out the exploration of problems they have identified. The group makes decisions, monitors, and keeps notes of the consequences. Regular reviews of progress

follow, with decisions made regarding when a particular strategy has been fulfilled or exhausted, and then applies discussions to new problems. The action research spiral then, consists of a plan, an action to implement the plan, observation of the effects within the context in which it occurs, and reflection leading to a revised plan.

Lewin's early ideas on action research point out that his approach to democratic participation in the workplace did not include a critique of larger society (Adelman, 1993). They did not take into account the power bases that define the social roles of production and how these relations influence the process of change. As action research is ultimately about social change, the question of how to determine what type of change is desirable needs to be asked. In the context of progressive education, Lewin seems to have been influenced by John Dewey in his development of methods and principles to enable the school to act as an agency of democratic change in the community. Dewey's ideas about the experimental nature of teaching, practical reasoning, and democratically based inquiry and action seem to fit closely with action research principles (Schubert & Schubert, 1984). Although these principles seem sound in relation to social change, the problem remains of how to generalize between societal conditions and their effects at the local level. Those with power to claim public definitions of social problems have much greater influence on social policy than those in lesser power positions (Adelman, 1993).

Within an orientation toward social change, Lewin strived to develop social-psychological theories of human behavior, particularly in relation to group conflicts and the struggles of minority groups. Through development of these theories, he hoped to increase the possibilities for group change in a democratic fashion. He pointed out, however, that group ideologies and stereotypes should not be viewed as individual characteristics, but are rather to be seen as cultural standards that change and adapt according to the happenings within and between groups. Another criticism of action research in the early days stemmed from the separation of science and practice within

the larger social science community. Although the action research approach of blending theory with practice has, in recent years, come to be seen as a strength, bridging the gap continues to be an ongoing struggle (Adelman, 1993).

Practice is both the starting and ending point of participatory social science research. This necessarily leads to practice as determining the content of research and of its associated reflection. The source of knowledge behind a theory derives from the production and reproduction of practice. In this way, theory and practice cannot be separated. The direct practice of an individual is related to others' practice through speech or writing, becoming indirect practice or theory. An understanding of theory, or social knowledge, informs practice leading to an understanding of the dialectical unity of theory and practice. Theory must be consistently verified by practice in order that theory may guide practice (Bryceson & Mustafa, 1982).

Action research has been employed in education, in the areas of school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs, and systems planning and policy development (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Rahnema (1978), states that an educator must act simultaneously as a teacher and as an agent of social change. The teacher's role should be not only technocratic and pedagogical, but also political in the broad sense of the term. Ensuring all children have equal chances to develop skills will not ensure equal opportunities in later life if we do not also work toward broader societal change. Dialogue needs to be used as a tool to help students understand the inequalities in society and accept their responsibility as agents of social change. Educators need to pose questions and initiate learners into the art of posing questions. In this way, education can become an integral part of a wider effort to achieve social change directed at developing the potential of communities to work toward their collective promotion.

Action research in schools is the trying out of new ideas in practice as a means of improving and increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching, and learning.

The application of action research to education began in the late 1940s at Columbia University Teachers College where the approach was used in a number of teacher-managed research projects. Interest in school-based action research has grown in recent years as a way for schools to have input into curriculum review and development and as a way for teachers to find new ways of teaching and understanding their work. The process can be carried out by varied groups of participants who share a common concern. These can include teachers, students, principals, parents, community members, and others who share an interest in the outcomes of education. Action research takes into account the fact that each situation is unique and complex and provides a method that is critical and practical (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Examples of school based action research include case studies presented by Elliot (1991), where he was involved as an external facilitator. All projects involved the implementation by teachers, of inquiry methods in their classrooms. The facilitator's goal was to develop a common stock of professional knowledge regarding the development of alternatives to traditional pedagogy. These projects were in response to the curriculum reform movement and the assumption that all teachers need to effect change is appropriate curriculum documents. Teachers need to be a part of developing solutions for schools. Through this process teachers were able to develop and implement pedagogical changes to their practice and the group contributed toward improved facilitation strategies for action research. Other projects helped teachers form links between reflections on theory and their personal practices. By opening up opportunities for reflection, teachers were able to articulate and develop the pedagogical theories implicit in their practices. Examples of school based action research in Canada are provided by Carson (1992) and Dicker (1990). The action research projects outlined by Carson demonstrate how the research group developed a greater appreciation of various dimensions of peace education in practice. These new understandings became possible through action and reflection. Dicker reflects on her own practice while

teaching a new course in a subject area that was unfamiliar to her. By examining her own strategies she became more aware of her teaching styles and determined that she was not creating the learning atmosphere she wished to provide. Action research provided the possibility for self-generated professional development.

Action research in education is not, however, without challenges. Studies by Adelman and others have shown difficulties particularly in the preliminary phase. Teachers often feel there is an area or issue that they believe is a trouble spot but have difficulty moving that feeling into a statement. To do so they must engage in ongoing reflection about their own and others' practice. Here, an outside researcher or the research group can help to clarify the process, but the individual teacher has to carry it out and locate appropriate terminology and initial action plans. The process of getting started can be delayed for this reason. Here, more help may need to be provided in the area of ways to describe one's own actions. Another problem area is that of commitment from teachers. Some of the concerns cited include lack of time for the project, skepticism of its potential to bring about change, unwillingness to take a risk, and lack of support from their school (Adelman, 1993).

Improving one's practice through action research involves first a broad and dynamic understanding of how one's own work is a part of the wider processes of education and society as they have been formed and reformed through history (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). We need to understand ourselves, our schools and schooling, and the values that we bring to the process. Education as social reproduction is seen as maintaining the identity of a society within the context of changes. Within this function, however, lies possibility for enlightened change through reflection. Through this process we can understand how society maintains its identity through patterns of thought and behavior. The contemporary forms of education we see today are a result of past and continuing struggles to improve schooling. Engaging in action research in schools is a form of this ongoing struggle. It is an opportunity for real life reform to

occur, brought forward by those closest to the real issues who can see the conflicts and possibilities and work through them together.

Gauthier (1992), reminds us that it is much more helpful to deal with what action research can do than with what action research is. In this way, we can focus on a search for answers through reflection and understanding of one's own practice. Reflections on action research then become grounded in ethical practice. In this space, ethical reflection on action and relationships becomes the focus and, in fact, the obligation of action research (Carson, 1989). Ruiz (1997), defines ethics, or the ethical relationship, as responsibility to/for the Other. He goes on to note that one's very identity and subjectivity are ethically situated in the interdependencies of our relations with others. The structure of ethics points toward a political relationship, or relations with all who make up the community. Within this responsibility lies the possibility for collaborative action research in schools.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), argue for a curriculum theory that embodies a social theory. This theory needs to address how participants in educational events and organizations can learn about themselves and their environments and collaborate in change based on learning. Critical theory has something to add to discussions surrounding the making of better communities. Social change begins with an understanding of oneself and one's place in the social order. This understanding can then provide a catalyst for transformation based on a social vision developed through reflection. Through education and an awareness of self, people often begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves and may take the initiative in acting to transform the society of which they are a part (Freire, 1993).

Critical theory as radical pedagogy has become problematic as it functions as a regime of truth, often immobilizing rather than guiding action. Gore (1993), suggests we focus on specific practices within local contexts, which seems to suggest a possibility for the inclusion of radical pedagogy within an action research framework.

Although there are different radical pedagogies, some versions of critical pedagogy offer a discourse that is helpful in looking at action research issues in schools. Giroux and McLaren's work is committed to a particular social vision related to social injustices and inequities of class, gender, and race which are perpetuated through schooling (Gore, 1993). Giroux maintains that his theory represents

> a particular way of seeing, a view of theory as a form of practice, one that rejects the fetish of defining the practical as the flight from theoretical concerns ... Theory as a form of practice points to the need for constructing a critical discourse to both constitute and reorder the nature of our experiences and the objects of our concerns so as to both enhance and further empower the ideological conditions for a radical democracy (Giroux, 1988, 36).

Freire believed that students should be taught the practice of thinking about practice, that is, they should be involved in social action. Learning experiences should be connected to the larger social reality. Linkages need to be made to the larger social reality by providing students with the opportunity to grasp the dynamic dialectic between critical consciousness and social action (Giroux, 1988). Giroux expresses this form of practice as a theory which can be used to create the necessary preconditions for a radical pedagogy.

Here then, is a proposal to teach a particular political vision. Although Giroux and McLaren have been criticized for not providing enough practical direction, a political vision provides the necessary basis for action research in schools. Certainly within the action research framework there is ample direction for practice that is available to all who wish to engage with the process. If knowledge is produced in the process of interaction and becomes what is understood between the parties engaged in communication, then action research provides direction for achieving social vision. Critical pedagogy hopes to create the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority. Freire and Shor offer practical ways to enable participants to critically evaluate the world around them without reproducing the relations of domination that are so difficult to avoid.

Gore (1993), emphasizes the problem with many radical pedagogies that often reproduce the very relations they are struggling to erase. She talks about defining collective identities of oppressed groups as leading to greater powerlessness. The authority to define seems to indicate a lack of freedom on the part of the oppressed. What we end up with is an essentialised image that groups then have to oppose in the struggle to create their own identities. Recognizing that power relations do exist in schools, we need to shift the power balance from repressive to productive. Educational empowerment through critical pedagogy needs to focus on the use of power as the handing over of authority to students at appropriate times so that they may define themselves. Using individual experience and group solidarity as a way to set political direction through an attempt to get at the truth leads to an analyses of the workings of power and knowledge.

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements .... the person occupying a specific position - whose specificity is linked, in a society like ours, to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth (Foucault, 1980, 132).

The functioning of regimes of truth within our educational system come to bear on the action research process in schools. No one party can attempt to represent the truth in any given situation as representation of the truth is constantly struggled for by the group as a whole. Giroux (1988), outlines Welch's theory that says if we are to create an alternative and emancipatory politics of truth, it needs to be grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse and action that addresses the suffering and struggles of the oppressed. We need to pay particular attention to the productive role that power plays in generating forms of knowledge that produce and legitimate particular forms of life and create particular needs and desires. As was noted earlier, conservative discourses in schools have emphasized the conservation of the social and economic status quo by safeguarding dominant power structures. By highlighting the productive effects of

power, educators can develop new forms of practice that take seriously how subjectivities are constructed within particular regimes of truth. Also important here is the development of a theory of experience that makes a sincere attempt to discover all types of experience and equate them equally.

The action research cycles of observe, reflect, plan, and act provide opportunities to examine existing power relations and develop new practices that shift the power balance. Gore (1993), reminds us, however, that despite the emancipatory intentions of those who employ action research, it still functions within a regime of truth. Discursive boundaries define what is acceptable action research which needs to be recognized as potentially limiting possibilities. Research conducted by a group of participants within a social situation will have the benefit of critique by all involved but still needs to recognize the limits of the research and the voices that are not heard. Recently the discursive boundaries of action research have expanded to include many more alternatives including individual reflective approaches. Reflective practice can help us become more aware of the practices of self and how best to alter those practices to change conditions.

Collaboration in Action Research

Oja and Smulyan (1989), point out that collaboration in action research suggests that each group represented in the process share in the planning, implementation, and analysis and that each contributes different expertise and a unique perspective. Often included in this process are school district personnel, university faculty or educational research and development center staff and national education agencies which provide financial support and guidance. Traditionally, much research was done "on" schools rather than "by" schools and was often completed at the University level or by outside researchers. The action research approach acknowledges that improved practice results from practitioner participation in the investigations of actions and issues they have helped to assess as being of immediate importance.

Lewin advocated the incorporation of group work into the research process because of the power of group interaction to develop new ideas and to produce commitment to change attitudes and behaviors (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). When practitioners are involved the resulting directions or actions to be taken are more appropriate while still maintaining precise research results. These results, however, generally apply to the immediate situation and may not be applicable to the larger society. Similar studies in other contexts may need to be conducted to confirm the universality of the results. Also important is the need for teachers and researchers to work together on common concerns. Cooperation provides a greater range and variety of perceptions and competencies and increases the likelihood of the study staying within limits that are possible to implement. Outside researchers often serve as leaders or facilitators who can encourage and develop the talents of the group and guide the process. As a cooperative venture, the overall process can contribute knowledge to the field and improved practice in schools.

Traditionally, the four basic elements of action research were its collaborative nature, its focus on practical problems, its emphasis on professional development, and its need for a structure which provides the necessary time and support for open communication (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Carr and Kemmis (1986), assert that the main characteristic of action research is collaboration, which allows for mutual understanding and consensus, democratic decision making, and common action. Teachers, researchers, and others work together, assuming equal responsibility to identify, examine, and resolve the concerns of the school. All provide unique insights and skills with no set of responsibilities being assigned superior status. Roles may shift over time and may not always carry similar work loads but are all still considered to be equal in importance. However, with this ideal we need to remember that that the individual members may hold differing power positions outside the confines of the research group that will likely carry over into the research process. For example, administrators may be

the direct supervisors of teachers or, group members may represent different cultural groups that occupy different power positions in society. Groups need to assess these power imbalances and reflect on how best to negate their effects.

Although collaborative action research seems to have the necessary potential to provide an environment that is supportive and allows participants to experiment with change and draw on the skills of other group members, it is necessary to examine the group process and how that process affects the outcomes. Although social relations of power may be evident initially, the action research process can mediate their effects. The discourse within the group continually changes as its members become more aware of power relations. The group needs to work at recognizing the ideologies that are represented and those that are not represented and critically examine their appropriateness. Sumara and Davis (1997), suggest this can be done by considering complexity theory as it relates to action research. Complexity in education and research shows how complex phenomena resist simplistic reductions and interpretations. Relationships among researchers and research situations become blurred as they function to generate individual and collective identities. The process of action research cannot be considered to be interpreting culture but rather creating culture. Researchers are actively involved and implicated in the research and as such their presence needs to be taken into account. Beyond the researcher, all participants and boundaries are blurred as the school and all who relate to it are part of a larger constantly evolving system.

Complexity theory is appropriate for examining situations involving collectives of persons such as exist in schools. The people engaged in the research process are evolving together as they mold and shape one another in a constantly changing environment. Together they form a complex system that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. This system is spontaneous and adaptable and cannot be understood simply by breaking it down and examining its individual parts. That is, an

understanding of each participant will not yield insight into how the group functions as a whole. The group itself functions together in ways that change its members. The way the group functions as a whole needs to be considered in order to understand how relationships functions to create the research environment. Within this opportunity we need to understand how we as researchers perceive the world around us. We need to examine our own understandings and belief systems as they affect our interpretations of the research events. What we have always taken for granted may not correspond to other ways of knowing.

Smith (1997), outlines a systems-theory model of identity formation that suggests we should understand persons to be fluid and impermanent. Persons should be seen in terms of their relations rather than their substance and so are defined by interactions with their surroundings. People exist inseparably from their experiences as part of a complex environment. In action research then, the group functions to generate new individual and collective identities that emerge out of the process itself. To understand those identities we need to understand our place within the research environment. The research group is part of a much larger system. Every identifiable thing is completely infused with everything else, never to be that thing for more than a moment (Smith, 1997). Reflection helps us to realize that Self and Other cannot be identified separately because identifying oneself requires an acknowledgment of the existence of the Other. At the same time we cannot deny the concepts of Self and Other but rather we should broaden our understanding of the relationship between them. We need to enlarge the space of the possible.

Smith (1997), also reminds us of the need to transform ourselves if we are to engage in the transformation of others. We need to question the social, political, and cultural forces that have shaped our current identities. We also need to recognize and question our own involvement in traditions and discourses that have perpetuated our current unequal educational systems. We need to listen carefully and pay attention to

others as we strive to understand how we live and relate together. Personal reflections will allow us to more thoroughly question our own practice. The world is complex with many different ways of knowing and interacting. Embracing all that is around us through awareness and thought will help us understand our own complicity in research and how through collaboration all members contribute to the unique outcomes of the process. Combining this social vision with reflective practice leads to transformative actions of ourselves and society.

Complexity theory encourages this emphasis on collectivity, joint action, and coemergence. This type of research also has much to do with the biological body as the collective unit is a biological unit. Sumara and Davis (1997), in their research recognized that modernist separations of home and school, teacher and student, and school from the real world, are artificial distinctions. In reality, all are intertwined, fluid, and complex. Actions and understandings begin to highlight how we all fit together in one complex unity. Working and discussing together allows new details and possibilities to emerge that would not otherwise have been created. As the group develops, it weaves greater and more complex understandings. As individuals and collectives develop, they become enfolded into one another and evolve together. This type of action research educates, and through education it creates new cultural forms.

Within the collaborative group however, particular roles are played by the individual participants in the research group. Roles develop over time and may shift as the needs and patterns of the project change. A key role in the group, which may emerge in different forms, is that of leader. Action research demands a democratic process whereby all voices are allowed to be heard, therefore the leader must play a facilitator role who can facilitate other participants. Often outside researchers provide this type of leadership. The researcher must have a sensitivity and democratic identification with the research group and be willing to combine critical insight and knowledge of the process (Bryceson, Manicom & Kassam, 1982). One of the key

issues in leadership is real or perceived power differences and how this may affect the group and the research outcomes. It is important for the group to acknowledge differences and build trust that responds to concerns. Roles also fulfill task and maintenance functions. Task functions lead toward goal achievement while maintenance functions include providing encouragement to all group members and increasing group interdependence (Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

Oja & Smulyan (1989), have looked at the role of the outside researcher, particularly the University researcher as a leader, and point out some of the problems. These include a difference in language, focus on different problems, and an overall concern with communication. Where perceived power differences exist there may be an inability to address necessary interpersonal and task demands. Often these researchers have greater knowledge and experience with the research framework so may have too much influence on data collection, analyses and writing of research reports. Without considerable caution the outside researcher may undermine the democratic process. Despite these concerns, many action research studies consider the outside researcher as a necessary facilitator of the process and method, someone who fulfills many of the task and maintenance functions. The outside researcher can serve to activate the process for change, including encouraging teachers to become involved, asking questions that challenge the status quo, and setting up meetings to begin the group process. Secondly, the outside researcher may bring a variety of resources to the action research that might not otherwise be available to them including time, and knowledge of research methods and theory which can enhance teachers' own understandings of their practice. Other roles for the outside researcher include acting as a sounding board against which practitioners may try out ideas and organizing and taking care of administrative tasks. All of this will need to consider the school climate and level of support from the administration.

HERMENEUTICS

The Hermeneutic Notion of Experience

Hermeneutics, or the art and science of interpretation, can help us in action research to understand not only our own practice but also to come to an understanding with others. Gadamer (1989), tells us that understanding is primarily agreement about something. Through language we can explore a particular subject matter that becomes the path and the goal of mutual understanding. As we engage in conversation with others, we determine if these acts are leading to understanding or if they are in vain. If understanding eludes us then we become aware of the individuality of the Thou and take into account the uniqueness of the other. A passage or statement can be immediately understood when one is familiar with the subject matter. When both parties to the conversation do not share the same knowledge, interpretation is required.

Gadamer (1989), points out that Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics as the art of avoiding misunderstandings. This makes understanding integral to all acts of communication. We cannot just consider the occasional instances of difficulties in understanding but must strive to make clear each and every communicative act. What is to be understood is not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker. Communication is a succession of thoughts as an emergent element of life. It is an act that is connected with many others. What is to be understood is not, however, shared thought but rather individual thought that is constructed and expressed freely within a shared environment. Through dialogue within this shared environment, thought is stimulated and meanings developed.

Understanding of meanings need to be discovered through a consideration of the context. That is, the individual parts cannot be considered in isolation from the whole. As the whole is a constantly expanding circle, delving into greater layers of interdependency, we must recognize that understanding and interpretation is a process rather than an end. Although this would appear to make understanding seem difficult at

best, Schleiermacher tells us it is to be overcome by feeling. Here he is referring to a sympathetic and congenial understanding and reminds us that hermeneutics is an art and not a mechanical process. The act of understanding considers reconstructing the production of the statement in order to get at the unconscious meaning of the author (Gadamer, 1989). For schools, this points toward the reconstruction of a child's past in order to understand the child's interpretation of the present. For research, this is a reminder of the many processes that go on within the framework of a project.

Individuals that are alien and unfamiliar to us tend to be judged according to our own concepts and criteria of value and are understood in relation to our previous experiences with people and understandings of life. We have seen how identities are formed in contrast to how we perceive others. Inaccurate representations are formed based on previous experiences and are put forth according to who has the power to do so. We need to be open to the recognition that we are all interconnected and share varying degrees of similarities. Dilthey reminds us that we share an inner historicity that belongs to experience itself. What we call experience and acquire through experience is a living historical process. This general life experience we apply to interpretation of those who are unfamiliar to us. When we find ourselves in a high immigrant and ESL classroom, for example, we need to be open to the knowledge that we all share a universal history and have all contributed to shaping our collective reality. This history is not the discovery of facts but rather a particular fusion of memory and expectation into a whole (Gadamer, 1989). This fusion of memory becomes somewhat problematic as people come together from many different parts of the world. History is interpreted and shared by different groups of people and individuals in different ways and these differing opinions may clash when they come together. At this point, experience can begin to reshape understandings although facilitative processes will be needed to bridge power inequalities.

Gadamer (1989), contrasts the concept of experience with the essence of the hermeneutic experience to show how the structure of experience is evident in historically effected consciousness. The origin of experience considers that the subjectivity of the ego is presented in the idealization of language which is already present in any acquisition of language. The individual belongs to a particular linguistic community that helps to determine their interpretation of events. When those involved in a shared experience come from different linguistic communities the difficulties for understanding are enhanced. Bacon is helpful here in calling for a careful directing of our minds, preventing them from indulging in overhasty generalizations (Gadamer, 1989). He asks us to examine our prejudices and points to the tendency of the human mind to remember what is positive. By careful attempts at understanding, we can overcome many of the problems often encountered when confronted with difference.

The concept of openness in experience is essential to understanding and learning from experience. Openness of experience to new experience lies in the fact that experience is only present in individual observation. It is essentially dependent on constant confirmation and is not known in a previous universality. Being open to new experience allows us to correct errors in our previous conceptions. If a new experience does not confirm what we already knew, then that experience becomes a different kind of experience. The crucial element is in the nature of the experience. Any experience is an event over which no one has control and is not determined by the observation itself. The experience is coordinated in a way that is incomprehensible. Experience is acquired unpredictably yet requires preparation. Learning from the experience is where we do have control and is greatly affected by prior experiences and how we have dealt with them. Through openness we acquire experience which prepares us to gain knowledge from new experiences. This knowledge is valid until a newer experience changes our understanding. Once we gain a particular understanding it holds true for other similar

instances. It is through this universality of experience that we begin to see larger truths (Gadamer, 1989).

The understanding of the other person requires a moral obligation. Hermeneutic experience looks for knowledge of human nature and does so by reflecting on the dialectic in relationships. We must acknowledge that there is a an inner historicity of relations in our lives and we are always in a constant struggle for mutual recognition. By recognizing this fact we can begin to experience others as they truly are. That is, we can listen openly to what others have to say without negating their claims through our preconceived notions. Openness is necessary in order to create bonds with other human beings. Belonging together always means being able to listen to one another. Understanding means being open to the other and recognizing that I must accept that tradition may have something to say to me that contradicts what I previously understood.

Relevance to the Action Research Project

As has been noted by Carson (1992), recent emphasis on the importance of action research has arisen out of discussions regarding the fusion of theory and practice. What is now highlighted is the importance being placed on interpretation. Much research in social science has focused on fragmented segments of the human experience making it difficult to find meaning in the findings. The use of hermeneutics as a way to interpret can help us to reground our understandings in practice. This school based action research project provided an opportunity for a number of voices to come together to provide new ideas and a sounding board for collective and individual ideas. While this coming together allows for greater possibilities and deeper understandings, an interpretive framework provides additional understandings. Being open to the experience of the action research process enables us to question prior assumptions. Hermeneutics points out the complexity of relationships which should be acknowledged as a caution against making generalizations while still providing us with

an opportunity to understand the complexities of the research process we are engaged in.

The action research project at the school was carried out by a group of teachers, administrators, and myself as an outside facilitator. The school's Assistant Principal had provided information on action research at a staff meeting and asked for involvement of all who may have been interested. An initial group of 9 out of a teaching staff of 16 attended the first meeting. Emma was in her second year as Assistant Principal at the school. She had come to the school with 12 years teaching experience, a strong ESL background, and some involvement in graduate studies. During the school year of the action research project she taught .4 in Health, Religion, and Social Studies. Harold was in his fifth year as Principal with 15 years teaching experience. At the time of the project he was teaching .1 in Math. Kathy was an ESL teacher with 15 years experience. She taught mainly separate ESL classes in grades 4 - 9. She also provided some in-class support. Richard taught a grade 3 class that had a high percentage of ESL children. His 7 years teaching experience were supplemented with a strong background in languages and recent courses in Religious Studies. Peggy was also an ESL teacher who taught mainly separate ESL classes along with some Language Arts. She had been teaching for 18 years and, for the duration of this project, was teaching mainly grades 4 - 7. Roberta was teaching grade 2 half time. She immigrated to Canada from the Philippines approximately 15 years ago and had been teaching for the past 8 years. Nhut taught Vietnamese, French, and Social Studies to grades 4 - 6. Nhut came to Canada from Vietnam 20 years ago and had been teaching for the previous 6 years. Justin was in his first year at the school but had been teaching for about 10 years. He taught Junior High Physical Education and Math. Kiersten, who was in her third year as Kindergarten teacher, came to the first few meetings only. Her insights helped provide clarification on areas of concern regarding ESL students and focus for research questions. The final two meetings were attended by Tanya, a teacher education student

who was doing her practicuum at the school. She offered perspectives from the position of being new to the school. Those who chose to be involved in the process were committed to improving a specific area of their teaching practice.

The action research group met seven times during the winter and spring of 1998. All meetings were held in the school library with me taking notes and Emma supplying the cookies. We alternated meeting times between lunch hours and after school. Lunch hour meetings lasted about 45 minutes while after school meetings ranged from one to one and a half hours. Although meetings were friendly and informal, we did not spend a lot of time getting to know one another. In retrospect this became a limiting factor in that it restricted our initial understandings of each others' research interests. As the rest of the group had worked together they shared some common understandings of the research problems and Emma and myself had engaged in some informal discussions regarding the same issues. What we did not do enough of was getting to know each other on a personal level and as a research group. After brief introductions at our first meeting, we moved into discussions about action research and the process we would follow. We began with some clarification of the educational issues at the school that the group felt needed to be addressed. We then discussed the action research cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflection and how group members could focus on their particular concern through this type of investigation of their practice. We talked about how change could be implemented quite quickly both within the classroom and the school as a whole. We discussed the fact that the questions could remain open and be clarified and developed as we went along.

This action research project was part of a larger, three year research project on Culture and Teaching initiated by the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. Initially the Department of Secondary Education had approached the school, along with two other schools, to become involved in action research projects. The schools were chosen because of their high levels of cultural diversity. As

well, the Assistant Principal at the school had previously expressed interest in action research so it was felt the school may be conducive to involvement in the project. Once the project was established, it became apparent to me that the issues being discussed were relevant to my Masters program and could form the basis for my Masters thesis. This secondary purpose led to the ethics procedure that I followed. As researcher/facilitator I discussed with the group my intent to use the project as the basis for my Masters thesis. Both Emma and myself emphasized that the thesis was not the original intent of the action research and that the idea of using the project for that purpose had evolved out of the school based concerns being discussed. Emma also pointed out the potential for others in the group to use research such as this to further their own educational pursuits through independent studies or to host a course for credit within the school. As well, we talked about authorship and the potential for any group member to be involved in the writing of articles about the action research if they so desired. It seemed important to clarify that the primary intent of the project was to provide teachers with an opportunity to improve their personal practice based on their own identified concerns. Any other research findings were of secondary importance. Following this discussion I distributed a letter outlining the project and asking for participants' consent. All participants signed the forms and returned them to me at this time. There seemed to be no objections to the use of the research project for my Masters thesis. It was made clear to the participants that their anonymity would be maintained and that data would be kept confidential. As a result, the names of participants have been changed and the name of the school is not revealed.

Children were not involved in the action research project although it was acknowledged that their input would have been meaningful. Some discussions arose around the idea that students who may be struggling with language, colloquial terms, or cultural meanings would be in the best position to identify which areas are problematic. We also talked about the potential for students to be involved in rewriting certain

curriculum materials. In terms of the action research project, however, obtaining the informed consent of parents, guardians, and possibly the children themselves complicates the process, particularly the power dynamics. This does not mean that children should not be included in future research but that their inclusion should be carefully considered so that it provides accurate, meaningful data. As well, this study looks at relationships between those in positions of authority and students, particularly those from minority cultures. Where it is lacking is in its analysis of the effects of relationships between students themselves. This should also be considered in future studies.

CHAPTER 4 - THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Background to the Study

The action research project evolved out of a common interest in issues of culture and teaching between the school and the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. As part of the Culture and Teaching project, the Department of Secondary Education was interested in understanding the kinds of educational programs and intervention strategies needed in teacher education which might be helpful in promoting ethno-cultural understanding. Collaborative school action research projects were included as a way to assist schools to develop new strategies for responding to the needs of their culturally diverse communities as well as providing the Department of Secondary Education with research findings that could be used to improve teacher education within the University's program.

My involvement in the project was as a graduate assistant to the Culture and Teaching project. I was enrolled in a Secondary Education Collaborative Action Research course which provided the theoretical base for the research method. My prior course work in intercultural education also provided theoretical frameworks for pursuit of questions related to culture in schools. As the project evolved, I moved on to an Action Research Practicuum which provided an outside discussion group and an opportunity for discussing potential problem areas, sharing and generating ideas, and a sounding board for points of reflection. Prior to the start of the action research I held a particular understanding of the action research process and how the project should unfold. Some of the literature I had looked at initially had advocated a fairly ridged adherence to cycles with clearly defined roles for members of the research group. As the project unfolded, a process which paralleled my involvement in related course work, my understanding of the realities of action research changed my perception of the process. At the start, I had felt the need to enter the situation as an action research "expert" in order to facilitate the process. I was worried that I would not be able to get

the group to follow the cycles as prescribed, particularly with reference to the use of reflective journals. I wondered also whether the group would accept my involvement as an outsider to the school and as someone whose educational background and experiences differed from those of the teachers and administration. In retrospect I now understand that some initial insecurities are probably a natural part of entering into an unfamiliar environment, particularly where the rest of the group members are already part of a school culture of which I am not a member. The research group develops another unique culture that we all contribute to as it grows and evolves. As for the action research process, I can now see how a project is molded and shaped as it goes along, based on the unique circumstances it encounters. Although it does follow the cycles of action research, they are neither rigid or consistent in their form. They are determined by the participants in the process and the needs of the particular project.

In terms of the subject areas of the research to be pursued, I had initially felt that although I had no prior knowledge of ESL learning in particular, this would not be a hindrance as my role was to facilitate the research questions developed by the teachers and administration and to keep the process moving along. Although I still believe this to be possible, I quickly began to desire knowledge of ESL issues in schools. I then began to read current literature on the subject which I feel has helped me to better relate to what the teachers were experiencing and provides an additional basis for interpreting the research results. The actual experience of teaching in an ESL classroom would have provided additional insights in this regard which is a point to consider in terms of my ability to interpret our discussions.

The school's involvement in the project arose out of concerns around language acquisition for ESL learners, ethical questions related to culture and the curriculum, and ways to equalize opportunities for all learners. The school is an elementary/junior high school located just north-west of the downtown core of the city of Edmonton. It serves an older neighborhood that is in transition from being an area of well established single

family dwellings to a district of mainly rental properties and low cost multi-unit housing. South and east of the school lies a commercial strip with a concentration of Vietnamese and Chinese businesses. North of the school lies the Edmonton Industrial Airport. In many families, both parents work, often at a series of part time jobs. The school qualifies for a hot lunch program but at the time of this research project, hot lunches had not yet been implemented. The school has a total student population of 340 with 125 classified as ESL. Within the school there are 190 elementary students and 150 junior high students. Many families in this area of the city are recent immigrants to Canada. Although only 125 students are classified as ESL, approximately two thirds of the students were born in another country. The families of the students at this school come from many corners of the world including, South East Asia, the Philippines, South America, and the Middle East. In addition to these recent immigrants, there are also a number of First Nations and other Canadian born students whose first language may or may not be English.

A look at the neighborhood and school population leads to an understanding of the specific needs of the school as identified by the staff involved in the research project. Initial discussions with the school's Assistant Principal, Emma, highlighted concern with the curriculum. She felt that language used in curriculum materials often assumes that all children have had certain experiences. This cultural bias puts some children at a disadvantage. Dei (1996), identifies this as the process of giving recognition and validation to the experience and knowledge of some groups, while denying that of others. Emma hoped the project could lead to teachers identifying "where in the curriculum ... assumptions are being made". Curriculum refers to the written and expressed rules, norms and values of the school, as well as the ways in which issues are discussed within academic texts and classroom discussions. Being sensitive to cultural differences would be a necessary precondition to identifying particular areas of concern.

We have seen how bias in the curriculum relates to questions of what is valid or legitimate knowledge and how this bias is important for minority students in that it relates to the social construction of meaning. We have also seen how resistance and struggle for power within the school environment are evident in the lives of many students. The action research group seemed to understand that schooling experiences of children are complex and operate on many levels including class, gender, and race. The group identified involvement in social justice issues as being important for their students in that it would contribute positively to self esteem. Many of these students are on the receiving end of social services and need to see how they also can contribute toward helping others. It was also noted by the group that self esteem can be enhanced through the preservation of culture and language. We discussed the fact that each child has a personal gift and that by discovering these gifts and building on them students can begin to believe in themselves early in life. This is particularly important for those students who are currently struggling academically. From these discussions it is apparent that the group recognized the importance of student's identities. What needs to be addressed in further studies is the power and resistance that is employed by students in the construction of these identities.

The other concern that was stated by Emma prior to the start up of the action research project was the "challenge of developing academic language skills in ESL students". This entails many considerations. One is an understanding of the difference between conversational skills and academic skills. In learning to read, comprehension needs to be separate from learning to read the words. ESL children also arrive at school with varying degrees of literacy in their first language which greatly affects their ability in second language learning. As well, personality affects ability to learn language. For example, a gregarious person is likely to engage with and learn the spoken language more quickly while a shy, perfectionist may focus more on written language. These are all considerations that the school staff were aware of prior to the project but wished to

pursue further. In acknowledgment of the importance of continued development in first language to second language learning, the school now offers a language course in Vietnamese to meet the needs of its largest ethno-cultural group. Teachers are also "encouraged to provide opportunities for students to discuss concepts with other students in their native language".

Another consideration in the challenge to develop academic language at the school is the need to make theory meet practice. Emma reflects, "if we (at this school) believe in ESL students and are good at teaching them, why do we wish to not have them in our classrooms?". Elements of this can be seen in Gore's (1993) presentation of the meaning of pedagogy. What she is referring to is a focus on the processes of knowledge production that points to the politics of the process. Instruction and social vision are analytical components of pedagogy that both require attention. The pedagogy argued for are the claims made about the process of knowledge production. The pedagogy of the argument is the process of knowledge evident in the argument itself. To date, the discourse in the school addresses a particular social vision (the pedagogy argued for) and recognizes the role teachers have to play in the process, but has failed to provide concrete direction on how to facilitate the necessary change. The power to implement change is placed in the hands of teachers through the action research process.

The school had a strong interest in the idea of action research and the potential it offered for school based change. None of the school staff involved in the project had, however, actually been involved in an action research project. The action research project began with some initial discussions between myself as the project facilitator and the school's Assistant Principal. At the outset, approximately nine members of the teaching staff were interested and committed to the process. Others were a bit more skeptical but thought they might join at a later date. As well as having an interest in action research, the school seemed to have an environment conducive to bringing about

changes to meet the needs of the school population. Teachers involved in the project stressed the importance of getting to know their students and listening to their stories because such a diverse school population has many different cultural, social, religious, and political experiences that have helped shape who they are. As Kathy noted, "significant learning doesn't happen unless a significant relationship is established". This acceptance and desire to know students can be felt walking through the school. Students generally offer a friendly hello or a smile and seem happy and secure in their school environment. Clearly this type of atmosphere puts students at the center of learning and sets the tone for an action research project aimed at improving teaching practice to better meet the needs of students.

Some of this atmosphere is achieved through specific programs and activities that are provided at the school. This includes cultural celebrations, a clothing bank, distribution of The Edmonton Journal to families, coffee meetings with parents, and encouraging parents to volunteer in classrooms. As well, through our discussions there was strong evidence of the need to get to know parents and the cultural considerations that are necessary in order to achieve this. Parents were encouraged to attend the parent session at Teacher's Convention and the school supplied a bus and translators. Translators are also involved in ensuring that notes going home to parents are written in the appropriate languages.

Getting Started

Emma initially felt some reluctance from teachers to get involved. Some teachers expressed concern that involvement reflected an admission of a need to improve. That is, they felt they must presently be doing something wrong. An explanation that action research is an opportunity to improve one's practice and a way to grow as a professional allayed some concerns. Other teachers who have been teaching for many years felt they had "seen it all before" in terms of research projects and new and improved ways of doing things. They believed this was just another

method that would likely prove to be ineffective. We were unable to bring these teachers on board. Showing the results of this year's project may provide some encouragement for future projects. Teachers just starting out seemed to feel they were not at the right point in their careers to reflect on their practice and identify areas that could be improved. I believe they would have benefited greatly, however, from involvement in the discussions leading into personal reflections on their own work. The group that did get involved in the action research were, for the most part, interested and dedicated to improving their practice.

At our first meeting, Emma introduced the project by explaining its tie-in to the overall Culture and Teaching project and talked about her personal interest in action research and what she felt it could do for the school. She then asked me to explain the action research process and my involvement in the project. We then moved into a discussion of the issues that were of concern to the teachers who were involved. I had noticed at this meeting that the group seemed to focus on me and seemed to expect me to lead the discussion. Most comments were directed at me, that is, people tended to look at me when they spoke. This initial focus was to be expected as Emma and I had started off the meeting by giving short presentations, were sitting side by side, and I was introduced as the facilitator. However, I felt I should strive to become an equal group member, rather than a leader, as quickly as possible because I believed my position would begin to affect what the group said and how they acted. I was concerned that they were checking the process with me for accuracy, which they may have needed to do initially, but I did not want to influence the natural unfolding of the discussions. I felt that Emma and I should not sit together at the next meeting as together we reinforce ourselves as a focal point. Emma's influence as Assistant Principal is a separate point that needs to be considered.

The group continued to focus on me at the second meeting. Emma wasn't in attendance at this meeting and as the table was round, positioning should not have

mattered. The purpose of this meeting was to formulate the areas of concern into research questions which involved my recording, helping to word the questions, and reading back to check for accuracy with the group. This could have partially accounted for the focus on me. The questions developed seemed to truly reflect the concerns of the group so I do not feel my influence to have had an adverse affect at this point. Following this meeting Jean McNiff had attended our Collaborative Action Research class at the University as a guest speaker. She had suggested that the facilitator should be reflecting on their role as facilitator as part of the group process. I shared with the group my intention to do so and said that I would be willing to share my reflections with them at any point. I believe this helped to change my role within the group and I noticed over time that we became more comfortable with one another and leadership started to be shared more and more.

Some of the initial struggles related to collaboration in this project could have been the result of the fact that we did not clearly define roles at the outset. It was not clear whether my role as facilitator also indicated that I should assume leadership of the group. Within the school, Emma is in a leadership capacity but it was not clear how that leadership related to this project. Emma naturally assumed some of the leadership and it would be difficult for her not to do so as her power within the group does not change with the addition of an outside facilitator. I wondered if I was perceived as a threat to the preestablished leadership roles and if we weren't, at times, competing for leadership of the group. I wondered how the teachers perceived our roles and initially it seemed we were unsure of how to relate to one another. This situation could also have been eased by doing more in-depth introductions at the first meeting. We each had an opportunity to introduce ourselves but without giving much background information. Knowing more about each other's work environments, areas of specialization, and general information would have helped us to understand and feel comfortable with each other more quickly.

Collaboration can also be difficult in a situation where different perspectives exist in relation to the topics being researched. My understandings related to culture and teaching derive from literature and academic endeavors and are predominantly theoretical in nature. These understandings form the basis for reflections on my personal experiences and practical applications of involvement in educational programs. Although some of the rest of the group members also have been studying and reviewing current literature, the bulk of their understandings have come from teacher education training, practical classroom experiences and reflections on their practice, and school based discussions. Their experiences were more school based than my own experiences. I believe that throughout the process we learned a great deal from each other but in the beginning it seemed we had some apprehensions. I recognized my own limitations in terms of a lack of practical teaching experience and felt that some of the group members may have felt they weren't keeping current with ESL literature. I often wished to share articles I had read that I thought were relevant to the discussions but generally did not do so as I was unsure of their knowledge base and did not want to assume the material was new to them.

Later on in the process I had an opportunity to discuss, with Emma and Harold, the use of outside resources. Emma outlined the backgrounds of the teachers involved in the action research in terms of their second language expertise. She felt the group should have the necessary knowledge to answer the questions we were addressing. In terms of introducing articles to the group, Harold noted that people need to be ready for personal development and need to feel they are in control of it. That is, teachers may feel pressured by the appearance of articles they do not have the time or inclination to read. We also talked about bringing in an outside resource person and all agreed that it was too soon to know if this would be appropriate but may be something we need to do later on in the process. The action research process may lead to the clarification of questions, issues, or areas of concern. This is a necessary first step to building a

workshop. We agreed to revisit this issue at a later date if the group seems to be moving in that direction.

As time went on, though, the collaborative effort allowed us to develop a method through getting to know one another, feeling more comfortable with the process, and making it work for our particular project. Dialogue seemed to be what turned a potentially rigid process into a research method that is molded, shaped, and made meaningful by fitting it with the needs of the project. As the method unfolded we became more comfortable and relaxed with one another and were able to focus solely on the research questions. We all entered the group with a particular interest which we each continued to pursue but the group also seemed genuinely interested in supporting each other through discussions and suggestions. My own interests were in the action research process itself as well as issues of culture and teaching. Specifically, I was interested in the cultural relations that exist within particular school environments and ways to equalize opportunities for student learning. I had come to believe that the hermeneutic notion of experience provided a framework for equalizing opportunities through getting to know one another. Reflecting back on the process I realize I put forth this notion in group meetings and that it was always met with favorable responses. It seemed that teachers also saw the value in getting to know students, and parents as well. My belief in the social value of the project, the method and some preconceived thoughts on outcomes would have lead me to provide encouraging comments in particular directions. Recognizing this influence, my hope is that I can also see the influence of other group members and accurately represent the events as they occurred.

Research Questions

The research concerns expressed at the second meeting fit into an overall theme that the group stated as: Knowing that our students come from a variety of backgrounds, how do we ensure student learning? Within this theme, the group developed the following questions:

1. What strategies can we employ to encompass the multiple levels of ability that are apparent within the ESL classroom?

2. Is the writing process an effective model for ESL learners?

3. What other teaching/learning strategies can we utilize to make language acquisition more comprehensive for ESL students?

4. How can we get to know our parent population and involve them in meaningful ways?

5. Does teacher assistant support in the subjects of Math and Language Arts improve overall student achievement in the grades 1-9 programs? What are the best or most promising models of teacher assistant use?

Each member of the group had identified one of these questions but may have had an interest in some or all of the other questions. It seemed as we went along that the questions were all very much related to each other. From here, the teachers were encouraged to research and experiment with some new approaches in their classrooms. The group also discussed the use of journals with reference to a section in "Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms" by Jack Richards. According to Richards (1994), journals are used for two purposes. The first is to record events and ideas for later reflection and the second is that the process of writing itself helps trigger insights about teaching. Journals were supplied by the school along with a personalized note from Emma encouraging the use of the journal and continued participation in the project. Reflections on the results of current and new approaches being utilized in the classroom would be reported on at subsequent meetings of the action research group. Although the action research cycle seemed to have been followed by the majority of the group members, the use of journals turned out to be a weak area. Future action research projects would need to include more encouragement and guidance on the use of and importance of journals.

The third action research meeting was devoted to further planning and the discussion of the results of some preliminary change efforts. Emma began this meeting with a focus on the issue of parent involvement. She presented some documentation on the current situation which indicated a low level of involvement by the majority of parents. At this time, parents were involved in snack time, bus patrol, helping in classrooms, phoning, School Advisory Council, clothing bank, and cub scouts. In all areas the numbers of parents involved were small. After listening to Emma, the action research group agreed with her assessment and the need to increase parent involvement. All agreed such involvement would benefit student learning. In planning a course of action, the group began by identifying some impediments to bringing more parents into the school. Impediments included parent work schedules, language barriers, and cultural unfamiliarity with the school. Some suggestions on ways to get started on increasing parent involvement including asking for help to sort newspapers and holding a work bee. The group felt that any initial attempts to incorporate further parental assistance should begin with parents who were already involved in the school. A coffee meeting was planned to solicit their advice in ways to involve more parents. The action research group felt strongly that the key to successful integration of parents into the school community would be to help them feel welcome and needed. Strategies to bring parents into the school initially should incorporate assistance from parents that is meaningful and helpful to teachers. The group recognized that these strategies would involve the use of many languages and approaches, as well as an understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, teachers acknowledged that many parents, some of whom may be learning English themselves, would have high expectations for their children's success.

The second research initiative discussed at this action research meeting questioned the relevance of the "process model" of teaching writing to ESL students. This issue was brought forward by Richard, a grade 3/4 teacher who had a high

concentration of ESL students in his classes. Although the process model was the approved method of teaching writing, Richard described how his students seemed to have real difficulty with many aspects of this model. Strategies such as brainstorming for writing ideas, organizing ideas, writing drafts, and making revisions seemed to cause particular problems for ESL students. Richard began his first Writer's Workshop session by reading out loud the first half of a book he described as "a realistic fiction and fantasy". The students were then asked to think about how it related to them and brainstorm ideas on how to finish the story. None of them verbalized ideas even when Richard modeled what was expected of them. We discussed possible reasons for this including: whether or not the story was culturally relevant to them; whether they understood what was expected of them; or, whether they had the confidence to take the risk of speaking their ideas out loud in a new situation. The action research group went on to discuss the work of Bilash (1998) which suggests that, in situations of second language learning, more time and specific examples may be required for students to complete a task. This observation seemed to hold true for the students in his class. Richard found he had much greater success when he went over the writing process with his students a second time. Students, he felt, had had more time to absorb the process and think about ideas for writing in English. Modeling the process a second time served as a reference point, assisting students to understand what was required of them.

Richard also began to experiment with computer word processing as a tool for writing with ESL students. He felt that the computer allowed students to work at their own level as well as enhancing their enjoyment. He found that students not only used the clip art function on the computer to illustrate their stories, they also showed a greater willingness to peer-edit their work. However, many of the ESL students continued to have difficulties editing accurately in a second language. The action research group suggested that other editing methods could be incorporated in addition

to peer editing. Suggestions included editing by older children, editing by the teacher, or by the class as a whole. Future studies need to consider how relations between peers may affect the editing process. Are minority students willing to take risks in front of other students whose languages skills may be perceived to be better and who have more cultural familiarity with the situation? As well, it may be helpful to make comparisons between the writing success, within a particular classroom, of ESL students and that of native born Canadians whose first language is English. This may highlight particular areas of the writing process that are problematic. It was also suggested that it might be useful to intensively immerse the class in the writing process for a couple of weeks in order to build the necessary skills. They would then be able to slow down the pace once the skills were established. Richard noted in later meetings that modeling was working much better with his students and he felt that repetition was the key to its success.

I felt this third meeting had gone quite well in that we moved toward completion of the first action research cycle. Richard and Emma had both reflected on their current situations and brought forth thoughts and ideas for discussion. Richard had tried his new approach to Writers Workshop and reflected on why it had not worked as well as he had hoped. The discussion that followed included possible reasons for the relative lack of success and ideas from the group for follow up. He left the meeting encouraged to go back with a new approach. Emma also left the meeting with concrete ideas for action. Once Richard and Emma had an opportunity to implement their revised ideas, reflect on their successes, and we could discuss it again at an action research meeting we would have completed a full cycle in relation to those two questions. I felt this should help the rest of the group to visual how the process works and motivate them to implement their own strategies.

A third initiative explored at the fourth meeting by the action research group addressed the issue of having multiple levels of ability in the same classroom. Teachers

have found that most lessons with ESL students require a multi-level approach. These levels are described by Bilash (1998), as: higher level students who work independently, interpreting instructions and expectations; a middle level group who need clear instructions, a concise breakdown of steps of the task, and adequate learning supports in order to complete assignments; and a third level of students who need even more structure, explanation, guidance, time, and assistance. Kathy noted that addressing the needs of students at different levels presented difficulties, particularly in a relatively small classroom. A room where different spaces could be created would be helpful. Teacher assistants were felt to be extremely helpful in a multi-level classroom, but they could not be relied upon as the only resource. The action research group discussed a number of ideas that they had tried in their classes. All group members agreed that computers are helpful in that they allow students to work at their own level. Justin described how, in math, he had successfully included strategies of tracking, charting, and setting daily goals with the support already being given by teacher assistants and student peer support. Nhut assigned different stories to different groups of students in his Vietnamese class and suggested that the more literate students as well as parent volunteers could be used to spend time talking with students who have lower language and literacy skills. In this way, academic language skills could be developed more quickly as the subject matter and setting of these conversations would encourage academic discussion. Richard pointed out that Writers Workshop is a program that also allows students to work at different levels.

Beyond these specific strategies we need to consider the cultural factors that may be inherent in determining what level a child may be at in the classroom. As was noted earlier, cultural bias in the curriculum was a concern expressed by the research group. Peggy provided a math example in the question, "what is the height of the ceiling?". The term "ceiling" is not relevant in all cultural contexts rendering the question unanswerable for some students. For many ESL students who appear to need

more structure, time, and assistance, the reasons may have to do with the relationship between culture and language. Nhut's approach to stories in his Vietnamese class clearly allows for this cultural consideration. The Writer's Workshop program could also address cultural bias by carefully selecting appropriate stories to use as examples and watching for bias in brainstorming ideas. This also holds true for the selection of computer programs and other strategies employed in classrooms of multiple abilities. As was noted by the group, the language within the question always needs to be considered.

Power needs to be considered here as well both in terms of teacher-student relations and student-student relations. Human interests, needs, desires, strategies, capacities, and forms of organization are all factors affecting identity. How these factors relate to language acquisition is a question that also needs to be considered. Future studies need to address how these variables change within a particular school context. How a child perceives his position in the school may affect language acquisition. As was noted earlier, teachers' attitudes toward diversity are reflected in the expectations they have of children in their classrooms. We need to consider whether we expect more of children with better language skills, that is, do we perceive them to be brighter with better chances of academic success. Where experiences with other cultures have been limited, prevailing social attitudes associated with race, class structure and political ideology may have more of an influence. Accepted models of pedagogical theory and practice may not come into question whereas an examination of students' needs may point to different pedagogical approaches. How students relate to other students also reveals how some voices are favored over others. This is another factor in language development that needs to be considered in follow up studies.

Another issue addressed by the action research group concerned the adoption of alternative teaching/learning strategies that could be used to make language acquisition more comprehensive. Roberta talked about the three approaches she was currently

using to build vocabulary with her grade 1 and 2 students. She uses a lot of phonics and adds two new letters per day blending them with previously learned letters. She uses sight vocabulary of 15 words per week and she models ways to use the words in a complete sentence. She also uses lots of repetition and patterning. She felt at this point that her method was lacking in terms of providing students with adequate opportunities for comprehension and understanding. She planned to work from this point towards making language more relevant to her students' personal experiences.

The group also discussed the possibility of introducing school-wide themes that would involve students in collaborative curriculum planning and that might foster positive self concepts. Emma had previously experienced positive results using school wide themes at another school and hoped to implement the idea at this school. We discussed how, in a culturally diverse school environment, themes provide a focus that many different experiences can relate to, providing a basis to highlight similarities. In response to this discussion, the school staff have now sketched out monthly themes, such as Changes, Heroes, Friendship, and Communities, for the 1998/99 school year and plan to encourage all students to relate experiences, including experiences from another place or in another language, to these themes. School wide themes enable the development of a common background knowledge of concepts, vocabulary, and understandings in addition to providing opportunities for tying diverse experiences together. Through this process, teachers will also be able to better know the backgrounds of their students. Teachers in the action research group noted that getting to know their students is extremely important to improving student learning. Here we see an example of the action research group having influence beyond their personal practice.

At the fifth action research meeting we addressed the issue of teacher assistants. The group noted that students seem to be feeling better about themselves as a result of the increased attention that can be given with the addition of teacher assistants. All

teachers involved noticed a decrease in discipline problems due in part to the presence of another adult in the room. Justin noted that he has students in his grade 8 math class who were working at grade 5 and 6 levels. Teacher assistants were able to work with them on a one to one basis and brought them up to grade 8 level. Peggy noted that more students are handing their work in because there are more adults involved to encourage and assist them to complete assignments. In general it was felt that additional one on one time provides students who may be struggling, with an opportunity to focus and boosts their confidence toward their work. All group members felt that teacher assistants were invaluable and should continue to be a part of the school community. Some concern was expressed that their time could be put to better use as they may be watching too much presentation of material by the teacher when they could be doing other things.

The action research group met seven times during the winter and spring of 1998. The final two action research meetings were dedicated to reports and reflections on each of the questions and making recommendations for future action. We decided to focus our reflections for these wrap-up meetings on where we were at prior to the start of the research project, where we were at the end of it, and what thoughts we have on where we plan to focus our actions for the future. Kathy began by saying that she had read second language learning resources years ago and had incorporated some ideas into her teaching. The action research process "made me reflect on what I am currently doing and put new ideas into lesson plans". She now actively looks for new ideas both by attending conferences and workshops and reading current literature. She is using more webs, graphic organizers, and other visuals. As well, she has come across new ideas on assessment and ways to incorporate themes. Although she had already been using themes in the classroom, reflection has helped her become more conscious of them and how to tie them together. Whole language learning is being emphasized as is highlighting as a way of allowing everyone to listen to the same lesson/story while

following along at their own level. In general, Kathy has found the process has raised her consciousness in terms of the issues and strategies related to ESL teaching/learning. Making a point of taking time to reflect has helped to make utilization of the strategies more methodical and habitual. In terms of the future, Kathy will continue to look for current literature and new ideas. She stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining strong relationships with students as these relationships are vitally important to student learning.

Richard found, in relation to process writing, that by "concentrating on one question I was able to become more conscious of it and more able to see shortcomings in my approach". Reflection was very useful in helping him become more proficient at analyzing and developing solutions. From the beginning he could see that writing process was good for ESL students and that it increased their confidence, however, some modifications were necessary. He now incorporates more peer editing and has recognized the necessity of having editors put their name on the work they edit. Editing involves both writer and editor working together and this needs to be recognized. As well, editors need feedback on their editing. Editing in Richard's class involves sharing, beginning with giving two complements about the story. This is followed by a couple of the editor's ideas that they think may be helpful and then correcting some grammar. Teacher Assistants are used where possible in this process. Richard also stresses the importance of modeling, beginning with a mini lesson for the whole class. He now uses fifteen minutes of silent writing to start the process and finishes by making sure they understand that it is a process. For it to be a process, each student needs to follow a story through to its completion. Publishing the final product will be a part of the process. In the future Richard would like to do more dividing of the class into two groups and having one group work on the computer with a Teacher Assistant while he works with the other group. In this way, he can develop closer relationships

with his students. Like Kathy, Richard also sees the importance of building these relationships.

In terms of other teaching/learning strategies, Roberta reflected on what she had been doing prior to the beginning of the action research which included a strong phonics approach. She came to realize that it is more effective to engage students in discussion rather than having them answer direct questions. This approach needs to include highlighting to parents the importance and the challenges this presents for students. Roberta noted, "many families are coming from countries where rote memorization is still emphasized and expect to see this approach used in schools". She now sees improvement in her grade 1 and 2 student's writing. Their stories are more creative, the printing is generally neater, and spelling seems to be better. They now have a lot of discussion before opening a book to read. They discuss the cover, including the picture, author, and illustrator, then ask questions and predict what the story will be about. Much of this is done in small groups which allows for more in-depth discussions. In math and science, Roberta is also using more interactive approaches and is trying to demonstrate where possible rather than just presenting a lesson verbally. In terms of future directions, Roberta would like to start her Book Shop groupings at the beginning of the year rather than mid-way through. She would expand the number of stations which would include writing, reading, vocabulary, and listening, and would teach routines for the first couple weeks of the school year. Students should be writing every day and she would like to improve efforts made in the area of editing.

Emma's final reflections regarding the parent population highlight some success but not as much as she would liked to have seen. Prior to this project the school was considering folding the School Advisory Council due to lack of interest. This was a crisis point from where the school staff decided they needed parent involvement particularly in a high immigrant and ESL community. They had been holding monthly

meetings but not expecting teachers to encourage parent involvement. A note was sent out to teachers requesting they get a parent to represent each class. This group has formed the core of the SAC. Emma would now like to see these parent representatives invite another parent on a rotational basis. This approach would seek commitment from more parents and express the school's confidence in the parent's abilities to advise on school matters. As parents become more informed they become more involved but there are other considerations as well. Interpreters are needed in order to get people out to meetings and also to be in attendance at meetings. Emma also realized, through attempts to encourage more involvement, "that even the English speaking, Canadian born parents have little understanding of how a school works". More information needs to be provided on decision making processes, what is involved in a teacher's day, and how the school is managed. Emma also noted that when you get more involvement from parents you open yourself up to more questions. This is a necessary step that has to be taken particularly in light of the tie-in between parental involvement and academic success. It is important to get to know parents and to let parents get to know you, even though there are risks involved. Other successes that have been noticed in the school are more teachers making regular contact with parents, improved response to parent/teacher interviews, well attended parenting courses, and additional volunteers at ethnic lunches. Future approaches should recognize that parents need more explanations and that continued efforts are important to student learning. Different learning systems are in place in different countries and these need to be understood and implemented where necessary in future approaches.

Final reflections regarding Teacher Assistant support again emphasized their important role within the school. Harold felt that their success should be able to be measured in part by comparing student achievement by grade level to Provincial achievement results. As student achievement results are gradually increasing, the school feels their approach is working and Teacher Assistants have contributed to that success.

Teacher satisfaction would also be a factor in assessing the success of Teacher Assistant support. If possible it would be important to increase the numbers and roles of Teacher Assistants in the schools. Harold felt Teacher Assistants should take greater responsibility and work toward being a part of the staff team. This would involve their acceptance as such by the rest of the school staff.

Reflections on my own role as facilitator have helped to shed light on group processes and directions that should be pursued. Initially, it seemed that members of the group looked to me to guide the process, but quickly became comfortable with the idea of action research and were then much more relaxed and informal in their discussion. As time went on there was generally no need for a formal leader as all group members seemed to want to move the process forward. People lead in many different ways and it seemed that many of us adopted different methods and practices to achieve our goals. Emma sometimes had specific strategies she wished to have the group discuss. An idea, such as school wide themes, was suggested and the group would then evaluate its possible merits. Other group members would lead by noting when we should move on to other questions. My own leadership was either in the direction of getting things started or reviewing progress to date and bringing up issues that had not yet been discussed but had been identified as research questions. Group dynamics were generally amiable and positive. The group has a pre-established working relationship with each other that seems to be supportive. Once we became more comfortable with each other they accepted me as a member of the group and seemed open to equality in conversation. This acceptance led me to think of myself as a contributing member of the group in addition to a strictly facilitating role. From this point on, I offered opinions and suggestions based on my understandings of cultural issues in schools.

In the relatively short term of the project, difference in opinion related to teaching method arose only once. This was related to teaching language using a phonics

approach that relies primarily on rote memorization. In general, the school's philosophy on literacy is that understanding based on experience precedes language acquisition. This difference in opinion was worked out between the two members involved, outside of the research environment, and seemed to have no long term effect on involvement in the action research process. In terms of facilitating future projects, either the continuation of this project or elsewhere, it will be important to watch power dynamics particularly where administration in involved in the project. Also important to watch will be the contributions by individual group members to the action research process. One group member in particular did not seem to be interested in improving personal practice and may have been involved in the project for inappropriate reasons. Commitment to the project and its potential benefits directly affects amount of time put into it. Reasons for lack of reflection and input need to be examined and greater involvement encouraged where necessary.

Looking back over the successes of the project, it appears that the focus was on the development of academic language over the other earlier stated concern of cultural bias in the curriculum. However, upon further examination it becomes apparent that the two concerns are actually part and parcel of the same question. Developing academic language skills in ESL students requires some careful consideration of cultural issues. With some new strategies in place and likely more to come as time goes on, the group could now turn its attention to specific questions about the curriculum. Action research has proved to be a useful research method for exploring culture and language issues at this school. This approach has allowed the staff to examine their own concerns related to teaching practice making the outcomes highly relevant to the school. Of particular significance were the research findings that personal reflection is extremely important for identifying problems in existing teaching approaches and analyzing and developing alternative solutions. Reflection helped highlight things that were working well and where and how to incorporate new ideas. Reflection also provided an impetus to

finding new ideas at conferences, workshops, and in current literature. In future, reflection should also consider ways to incorporate the voices of students in identifying problem areas and strategies for action. The action research group stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining strong relationships with students as these relationships are vitally important to student learning. The group also noted the importance of getting to know their parent population and letting parents get to know the school staff. This action research project has been a collaborative and reflective venture that has involved teachers, administrators, and parents in working in new ways with students from diverse backgrounds. It is hoped that these relationships can continue and be enhanced in the future along with the addition of students in the collaborative effort.

CHAPTER 5 - OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

A LOOK AT RELATIONSHIPS

Within the action research experience at the school, many relationships evolved and developed that had an effect on the research process and continue to play a part in daily school life. A look at these relationships highlights the many ways we relate to each other and how these relations may determine group actions. Particular relationships were focused on within the research project and seem to have had a greater impact on our discussions and, therefore, on this analysis. However, this does not negate the significance of other relationships within the overall education of students as all are important and need to be recognized as such. Relationships are all so individual and are affected by so many factors that it would be difficult to understand all the significant experiences that have had an impact upon them. Through this analysis I hope to highlight the importance of culture to these relationships and show how this understanding can improve learning opportunities in an ESL environment.

Facilitator/Group Relations

In beginning to understand my role as facilitator and my impact on the group I must first reflect on my attitudes and actions at the beginning of the process and how and why I changed throughout the term of the project. Reflecting back on my own schooling experience was touched on in an earlier chapter, in relation to the attitudes that were prevalent at that time and their representation in schools, however, further thoughts related to identity formation illuminate other factors. As identities are formed in opposition to others, clearly there existed a dominant culture and others who were "different". The value of the white, middle class experience, such as my own, was clearly evident in the school I attended which reflected the values of the town itself. Those families whose adult male held economic positions that were considered "white collar" and whose wives were stay at home parents were considered to be the ideal family type and enjoyed the greatest respect within the community. The children from

these families were considered to have "what it takes" to succeed and were groomed to follow the necessary path to success through their school years. Teachers tended to perceive these children as bright and funneled a disproportionate number of them into University Entrance courses. For most teachers, experience with other cultures had been minimal. A conservative educational ideology was dominant in the school, with virtually no resistance offered by alternative points of view. Pedagogical theories and practices were based on traditional views and were never questioned as to their effectiveness. The power to control education resided with teachers, administrators, curriculum writers, and government officials. Parents and the wider community had little involvement and students had even less.

Those whose origins were British, again as in my case, assumed an air of superiority. The next largest ethnic group in the community were of Ukrainian heritage and were respected as hard working people but lacking in accepted cultural norms. Many of these people arrived in Canada from conditions that required them to work hard to grow and prepare their own food to last throughout a long, cold winter and brought that lifestyle and those skills with them. A lack of understanding and appreciation for the values inherent in their approach to careful use of scarce resources lead to subtle forms of discrimination, particularly joke telling. Just as the Ukrainian people's lifestyle and values were not valued by the larger community, the cultural identities of those children were not validated within the school system. The contributions made by people of Ukrainian heritage to the building of the Canadian nation were completely ignored in the school curriculum. As a result, most of these children abandoned their family traditions and cultural norms in favor of a more acceptable dominant cultural identity. Resistance and pride in diverse identities was not nearly as apparent then as we see in schools today. In terms of my own identity, my cultural norms were validated in school and I could take pride in the fact that I wasn't "different".

The other cultural group that existed in the community were Native people. Reflections back on the town's treatment of Native people reveals the poor conditions most lived in and the complete lack of respect given by the larger community. Again, a severe lack of understanding of what lead these people to their current situations is the most likely reason behind the behaviors of many people. Most people did not understand the historical events leading to breakdown of many Native communities in Canada and did not value Native culture. The historical representation of Canadian history in our school was of course not favorably oriented to a Native perspective. As Native values were not recognized as important by the wider society they were also not given value in the school. Many of these students dropped out of school early as their cultural identities were not validated within the school system. In opposition to White, Eurocentric norms, values, and ideas, these youth could construct for themselves an identity that did not quite measure up. Their culture had slowly ebbed away along with their language and self confidence.

Also within the community there were a few children who would be considered visible minorities but who had been adopted by white families. These children were raised with the values of the family and did not seem to be introduced to other cultural practices. Clearly within this time and place my own cultural values and language were validated giving me a sense of belonging and a faith in myself and my abilities. This confidence clearly puts people at an advantage as it is necessary to learning. I now realize, however, that this sense of self came about as a reflection of the cultures around me. Their positions of lesser status were necessary in order for my position to have superiority. This past continues to play a role in my constantly evolving identity even in light of my understanding of it. Even though I believe I no longer hold a sense of superiority, the self confidence I gained through those original identity formations have stayed with me and continue to offer an advantage to me in many endeavors.

If I consider that my early identity was structured by the way I was seen by others, then it must be assumed that at that time nothing significant happened or was articulated to challenge my perceptions. It wasn't until I moved to Edmonton and began to not only encounter much greater cultural difference but also get to know people from diverse cultural backgrounds that I met with clashes to my understandings. These experiences helped me to value and appreciate differences and recognize many similarities within those differences. As current writings on identity formation point out, we now recognize a stronger sense of otherness and the significance of the ways we participate in society. My own experiences have lead to an understanding of the influence of others on my own identity formation. Others mold and shape who we are within complex relationships of power and resistance, continually changing how we perceive ourselves.

When I first walked into the action research environment then, my identity as a researcher began to be shaped by my interactions with Emma and others. Clearly there is a hierarchy within a school and, as a member of the research group, I had to struggle to find my place within it. Ethno-cultural background at the point of entry is relevant in that Emma and I are cultural equals in terms of our status granted by society, therefore it does not give one of us an advantage over the other. Within the school, Emma is in a position of power, but within the research project, initially it seemed I held the power position as researcher thereby equalizing our relationship. This of course is only a part of what shaped our early encounters. Our conceptual understandings related to culture and teaching, personality traits, and language used are other factors that contributed to group formation in the beginning stages.

In terms of the whole group, ethno-cultural and language factors had a more significant impact on our relations. In larger society, the cultural makeup of the group would probably have ensured participation in both the centre and the margins with those who are visible minorities being relegated to the margins. However, within the

action research group where there seemed to be an attempt to treat all members equally, the centre and margin situation was limited. To begin with, teachers have generally equal status due to the fact that they are all teachers. Where I could sense that some teachers did not receive the same level of respect it was because of teaching styles or methods that other teachers did not agree with rather than due to any cultural differences. Cultural difference within the group seemed to be respected. For example, the Vietnamese teacher's comments and ideas on teaching ESL students were always met with positive response from other group members. The possible influences of cultural differences are a consideration that should be reflected on in further research to determine the many possible impacts they may have on teaching in this setting.

My attitudes going into the project reflect my identity at that particular time. Identity is constantly changing, therefore, my own sense of self had to have changed throughout the term of the research project and as a result of involvement with the research group. How and why I changed throughout the process is based on my experiences within the project itself and as a result of concurrent involvement in related course work through my graduate studies program. The discourse of the research group developed as a result of involvement by teachers, administration, and myself as action research facilitator. The space created by the action research discussions allowed for the emergence and transformation of various topics and language usage. Being introduced to the discourse of the school changed my perceptions in terms of language related to elementary / junior high education, language used in ESL teaching, and cultural issues in schools. For most of the group members, the discourse of action research was new as was some of the language of theoretical cultural issues. All of this comes together to create a new discourse which is part of the culture of the action research group.

Power within the group played a role in determining legitimate knowledge and its appropriate language form. First, some mention needs to be made of the

predominance of white teachers and administrators in the research group. Although the school has made a conscious effort to hire teachers who more accurately represent the school population, there are still some strides to be made in this direction. White privilege still is a factor in determining life chances leading to greater enrollment of white students in University programs in general, but particularly in teacher education. The Culture and Teaching project explores the ambiguities of Western Canadian multicultural education. As urban schools are experiencing rapid changes in ethno-cultural composition of student populations, the backgrounds of most pre-service and practicing teachers remain culturally homogenous (Carson et al., 1998). As well, teaching is a profession that seems to appeal more to some ethno-cultural groups over others. Some recent immigrants have come from countries where teaching is not particularly respected as a career, both in terms of status and monetary rewards, so is not pursued here as a career choice. Evidence of this can be seen in a Culture and Teaching project interview of a Filipino student teacher. He had started out in the Faculty of Science at University and later transferred to Education. He felt his father was disappointed in his choice and had "damaged him by negatively comparing him to other Asian kids". This type of pressure from parents has an effect on many students' career choices.

The scenario of over representation of dominant cultural perspectives also held true for the action research group. Knowing the ways of society at large as well as unspoken rules of schools may have given teachers from dominant cultural positions the necessary confidence to contribute their thoughts and ideas to a greater extent. Part of power to define legitimate knowledge comes from taking that power. The members of the group who were most vocal assumed the right to set parameters. As well, as all our discussions were in English, greater confidence in one's ability to use the language effectively would result in a greater likelihood of taking chances. Another factor may have been cultural differences in terms of how much speaking it is appropriate for a

person to engage in. As was noted in the literature review section, cultural norms have an effect on conversation. Silence is more valued in some cultures than in others. Roles in conversation and how much information should be given is also related to cultural norms. The action research becomes a site of struggle that can lead toward changing existing power relations in schools. In terms of this research project, this could have been facilitated in part by spending more time initially to get to know and understand each other. In this way, the existing power relations may have been revealed allowing understanding of relationships and ways to equalize input. Future research needs to consider these relations and ways to reflect on them.

In terms of my parallel studies, both my reading of culture and ESL literature and my involvement in action research courses had some impact on the group. Reading of current literature led me to ask certain questions and offer suggestions I would not otherwise have given. This may have steered discussions in certain directions. It also helped to changed my role from a purely facilitating one to a participating member of the group. The action research course I was in during the initial discussions with Emma and through the early phases of the research project was theoretical in nature and provided me with a base and appropriate language to enter the project with. The earlier readings presented a formal view of action research which would account for my initial feelings that I had to ensure the group adhered to rigid research cycles. Toward the end of this course, we worked more with reflective case studies that highlighted for me the individual nature of action research projects. Moving into the practicuum term, I began to understand the messiness of action research and how each process has to be tailored to meet the needs of the project. The action research practicuum also provided a forum for discussion of this project on an ongoing basis through the majority of the project's duration. This helped me clarify certain events and their meaning to the project. For example, we discussed my role as facilitator and the ways in which people lead which

helped me to better understand the many and varied leadership roles that were engaged within the group.

Wider School Relations

The relations between the school administration and the teaching staff need to be considered as well in terms of their possible impact on the group. First, it could be assumed that those who chose to become involved in the project were on friendly terms with the administrators or possibly wanted to show support for the project since encouragement to become involved came particularly from the Assistant Principal. These may have been factors for some but it was also clear that the majority wished to improve their teaching practice. School culture has an effect as those in administrative positions generally have greater authority to define legitimate knowledge in schools. It is difficult to know if teachers screened their comments because of the presence of either the Principal or Assistant Principal. Although it did not appear that they were, it is possible that these individuals had more influence on the direction in which certain discussions headed.

Relations between school staff and the parent population have different cultural dimensions to them. In a largely working class community, such as the community of this study, the teachers and administrators hold power through their positions in society. This holds true for many Canadian born parents, but particularly for families who have recently immigrated from countries where parents may not be as welcome in the schools. As was noted earlier, approximately two thirds of the school's students were born elsewhere. As well, the school staff tend to have dominant cultural backgrounds while the parent population represents mainly minority cultures. The school identifies approximately 10% of their student population who represent mainstream culture. This again gives the school the power to define the relationship and how it should unfold while limiting the resistance provided by parents. The school has defined how and why parents should be involved in the school and are implementing

methods to solicit that involvement. Although the staff plan to ask parents for further ideas, due to language, cultural, and social barriers, parents may not offer their opinions on if and in what ways they should be involved in their children's education. This highlights the importance of getting to know the parent population in order to break down these barriers and determine the relevance of their experiences with education and how those can be incorporated into the school. As well, it would be important to determine students' views on parent involvement as well. This would involve asking the parents and students for feedback on what they could offer to the school. For example, it may be more appropriate to ask a parent in to the school for oral story telling, than to read English language books to the child in an ESL home or a home that reflects an oral tradition.

Another dimension is added to this relationship as was noted by Emma in her comment that "just because parents come from elsewhere and are learning English themselves, they still can have high expectations (for their children's learning)". The findings of Codjoe's (1997) study emphasize the importance of this understanding. He found that when Black students did well in school it was very much related to parental involvement. The role of parents in fostering school success in Black students was the most critical factor. Parents were able to create learning environments at home that instilled confidence and desire to learn in their children. An understanding of this dimension can lead to the development of appropriate approaches to parental involvement. It highlights the importance of the research group's suggestion that parent's should be involved in bringing other parents into the school. As well, at future parent sessions in the school it may be helpful to share findings of studies such as Codjoe's that demonstrate the importance of home environment to student learning.

The other side of this relationship involves school staff opening up to parents. Openness on both sides involves an understanding of oneself and the power one holds in a relationship. By letting parents know the experiences and understandings that the

teaching staff have, parents can feel more comfortable in the school and have a greater understanding of the role they can play. Initially this involves some risks of opening yourself up to criticisms, but ultimately an understanding of why people engage in certain actions should prove fruitful for all involved. Conflicts and misunderstandings can be avoided by coming to understand the motivations of others. The findings of this action research project highlight the importance of building these relationships and taking the associated risks.

Initial relationships between the teachers and their students also had an impact on the group's direction and the nature of the discussions. For the teachers who got involved with the project in a serious attempt to improve their practice, it would seem that a certain belief in students and their potential would have lead them to the project in the first place. The teachers and administration involved in the project seemed to share the belief that all students have what it takes to learn and that life circumstances have put some at a disadvantage. Better teaching methods can and do improve student learning and it is with this goal in mind that the research questions were developed. As Roberta found after altering her approach to teaching language, "the kids' work is showing great results - good stories, neat printing, and good spelling". With language and literacy as the driving issues behind this project, it would seem there is an acknowledgment of their importance to learning and, in fact, to overall student well being. Those ESL students who improved their academic performance through work with teacher assistants provide an example. As was noted, "kids are feeling better about themselves". Codjoe's (1997) study of Black students who were academically successful also highlights the importance of a positive relationship between teachers and students. Successful teachers were culturally relevant and worked at making minority students feel welcome in school.

Student identities develop, in large part, through interactions with others within the school environment. In order to make sense of their lives and relationships,

students need to develop voice. As this struggle is engaged in through the use of language, it must be carefully fostered through respect and encouragement in the school. This means encouraging the development of first language both as a means to foster literacy in second language but also as a way to instill pride and self confidence in a student's first language and cultural heritage. As the school recognizes and strives to accomplish these goals, students seem to be given the opportunity to develop their voice. The introduction of Vietnamese as a course was done in response to its importance in teaching second language but also due to the role preservation of language and culture plays in self esteem. This in turn should have positive benefits in terms of identities developed and overall feelings of satisfaction with the school community. Positive student voice and a respect expressed through approaches to languages could contribute toward a positive school environment. Codjoe (1997), notes that students' perception of school environment is a factor in school success. With this in mind, and the sense that the site of this study has elements of a positive environment, it would be important to look at what factors contribute to this environment and what effect they have on student learning. Codjoe (1997) also points out that teachers who can bring out the best in students contribute positively to their students' school success. Although it is important for students from minority cultures to see role models who share their cultural background, it is also possible for all teachers to achieve success through culturally relevant teaching. The teachers in the action research group appear to be sensitive to the needs of all students, however, it would be important to look at how they may or may not build on students' experiences and cultural strengths.

Students also need to learn the discourse of the school in order to get along within a fairly rigid educational structure. The power of the teacher and of the curriculum are both determining factors in shaping the discourse that is used. The cultural mix of students and staff within the school has helped to mold a particular discourse that is unique to that environment but is still largely dominated by structures

of public and private representations within the school. The forces that shape the curriculum, the political interests and practices that affect schools, and the ways in which teachers' views and approaches have been developed over time need further study. At this school, there seems to be an awareness of these influences and a struggle to determine exactly what areas may be problematic. This is a good first step and the action research has and can continue to provide them with solutions and future directions.

CULTURE AND ESL ISSUES

The outcomes of the study highlight the challenges to developing literacy skills in ESL students and the important distinction between BICS and CALP. The development of cognitive literacy skills in ESL students continues to be a necessary focus at the school as many of their students are struggling in this area. The many factors involved in literacy development were acknowledged at the outset of the project and were a focus for many discussions. Some teachers had felt that certain existing approaches to teaching language proficiency were inadequate for ESL students and wished to improve approaches to more accurately meet the needs of these students. By the end of the project teachers concurred with the literature which points to a more communicative approach to teaching that gives students an opportunity to use the language in a meaningful way.

Process Writing

The literature tells us that ESL students using process writing have shown growth in a number of areas, a finding that also held true for Richard's students. Through repetition and modeling, the students were able to understand the process involved and were able to produce more effective texts as the year went on. Computers proved helpful in this regard as they enjoyed working on them and could work at their own level throughout the process. Initial struggles the students were having in coming up with ideas for writing topics were eased through repetition and modeling of

brainstorming. However, many of these students continued to lack expertise in first language writing thereby limiting their abilities in second language writing. As Cummins (1984) points out, writing expertise in first language is psychologically distinct from ESL proficiency. As the students' abilities grew in ESL writing proficiency, their cognitive abilities in first language expertise did not seem to be keeping pace. As was evident in year end student achievement results, the students did not yet seem to have the necessary cognitive abilities related to literacy. Through greater abilities in second language, students can fine tune their work but cannot produce more complex writings to work with until literacy is also increased. With greater proficiency in more cognitively demanding context reduced tasks, students should be able to write more complex stories which process writing will help them to produce more effectively. The ability to achieve more cognitively demanding tasks will require a consideration of culture and identity issues in the development of these skills.

As well, the evaluation of the complexity of the stories needs to reflect cultural sensitivity. That is, we need to consider our own cultural perspective in evaluating what constitutes a well written, complex story. Sarris (1993), writes of the possibilities for understanding ourselves and one another through cross cultural communication. He provides an example in the "Coyote Story of Junco" which was written from a Native cultural perspective. In this story, the actions are what provide meaning for the text providing lessons and understandings of relationships within the world as we know it. Sarris points out the tendency to interpret the story literally, through the subject rather than the actions, making it appear more as a story about creation, as having happened at an earlier time and place. Different interpretations completely change the meaning of the text and mask the complexity within it. Understanding cultural differences may help us recognize writing expertise. Once students have skills in their first language, they can form hypotheses about writing in English which can in turn be edited by knowledge gained through process writing.

Greater proficiency in context reduced tasks comes about as a result of many factors. As was mentioned earlier, the school has recognized the importance of first language development to second language literacy. To this end they have introduced Vietnamese language as a course within the school which is very beneficial to students whose first language is Vietnamese. However, this benefit is not yet available to other language groups. Other smaller initiatives hope to target all ESL students. These include having students discuss in first language the concepts learned in second language. This is done by having students work in small groups of similar language speakers. As the concepts learned become more cognitively demanding, first language development will need to keep up in order to remain a useful tool for second language learning. This will require some additional initiatives in development of first language.

Reading of literature written in first language could be emphasized more as a way to develop literacy skills. A home reading program could encourage parents to read to their children in first language and have children read to parents in second language. At present, the school does not have books written in languages other than English which could be taken home by students. A number of avenues could be explored to build these resources. First, the families themselves may have written materials that could be shared with other families through a school based exchange system. Cultural groups within the city may also be interested in getting involved in either donating books or other resources. The school itself could consider purchases of these materials when adding to its library in the future. Also necessary to consider is the importance of oral story telling for those students who come from oral traditions. Oral story telling in first language should also be encouraged with these families. Recognizing that a communicative approach is important in the development of language proficiency, parents and community volunteers could be utilized within the school as first language resources. This would not only encourage the use of first language but also highlight to

the students the importance and worth of first language and family involvement in education.

Process writing helps the second language learner to understand how to write appropriately in English. The formal modes of written English need to be understood by the writer in terms of how they relate to culture and how they may be different from the formal modes of the student's first language. Student's often experience difficulties related to applying rules of first language to second language use. For example, the action research group noted, if first language does not include past tense, a student may say in English, "I go to the store yesterday". As this rule is appropriate in their first language, they often have difficulty recognizing the inaccuracy of the statement they have made in second language. Teachers in the action research group seem to have recognized the existence of these language differences along with differences in cultural norms of communication. However, what to do about them remains a challenge in many cases. It is not simply a case of teaching the rules of the new language. It is changing the rules that the student is currently using to ones that are correct for the language being learned. Like changing an already ingrained habit, it requires not only helping the student to understand the error but also constant attention to establishing a new habit.

An understanding that students may apply different rules to a situation helps to recognize that some students may take longer than others to establish patterns and meanings within the discourse of the school. Modeling and repetition will be extremely helpful in this environment, however, where it is known that cultural factors may be limiting new understandings, careful explanations of the differences may be in order. Learning new content will need to be context embedded in order to provide meaning to the student. This includes making social facts and linguistic patterns meaningful for the student. The language ESL students are learning is that which is spoken by the dominant group while many ESL learners are from minority cultures. There are

considerations here related to power structures and the cultural domination inherent in the language to be learned. This shows up in Peggy's concern with the "everyday language within questions" and the "colloquial terms used". However, the respect for other languages shown at this school will hopefully limit the negative influence of this factor on language learning. What will be important is to recognize the rules we are using and understand that they are not culture neutral. We all engage in conversation from our own cultural space even if our space is that of the teacher of second language. Recognizing our own perceptions will be beneficial in helping ESL students to understand new and often confusing languages uses.

Multiple Abilities in the Classroom

Multiple levels of ability and language skills within an ESL classroom seems to be an area that is relatively new in terms of studies completed. Bilash (1998), outlines the levels that can generally be found in an ESL classroom, a finding that held true for this research project. The literature, however, seems to be limited in terms of how to approach these different levels in the classroom. ESL funding is certainly a factor here as more resources can be applied in relation to those students for whom funding is received. Particularly with the third group, teacher assistants are extremely important to provide one on one guidance to help students understand instructions and assist them to complete assignments. Future studies of multiple levels of ability need to consider the wide range of differences in social and cognitive adaptations of children to their new surroundings and the wide range of approaches needed in educational strategies to meet these needs. Beyond strategies we need to question why multiple levels of ability exist in the first place. What role do cultural factors play in determining levels, both in terms of the child's cultural background and ability and desire to adapt, as well as the teaching approach? By implementing a multicultural and/or anti-racism education approach, would multiple levels of ability melt into individual differences?

Active use of second language is important regardless of individual differences. This includes both writing and speaking the language. Communicative interaction can be emphasized in many ways in a classroom that has multiple abilities. Small group work where the groups consist of a mix of language abilities may provide opportunities for all to engage with the language. Teacher assistants and parent volunteers can also be helpful in terms of talking with students. Written interactions such as journals, where the student writes and the teacher responds, provide opportunities for communicative interaction as well. Through a personalized approach such as this, comprehensible input can be varied to meet the individual needs of the writer. This also provides opportunities to get to know more about the student through the content of their writing. By knowing students better, individual learner attributes, such as age, personality traits, and confidence, can be taken into consideration. Validation of students' identities can also happen through an interest shown in cultural backgrounds through journal or verbal responses.

Other Teaching/Learning Strategies

The importance of providing opportunities for comprehension and understanding for ESL students points to teacher education programs. As was stated earlier, many ESL students receive most of their instruction from regular classroom teachers, many of whom have little or no specialized training in ESL teaching. Instruction designed to impart knowledge on the child or test their existing knowledge base is going to cause difficulties for ESL learners. Teacher education programs need to provide some theoretical base for ESL learning as many teachers are going to encounter ESL students in their classrooms. As well, teacher education needs to include preparation for the complexities of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. The importance of engaging students in dialogue, repetition, patterning, and the use of themes were highlighted through this action research question as strategies necessary in an ESL classroom.

A HERMENEUTIC LOOK AT RELATIONSHIPS IN A MULTICULTURAL / ESL CONTEXT

A look at the hermeneutic notion of experience seems to provide some insight into the outcomes of the study. An understanding of how experience has shaped us and our practices helps us come to an understanding with others. In terms of this action research project, a look at my own experience helps me understand my interpretation of events. An attempt to interpret how others' experiences may have shaped them sheds more light on the analysis. How all of these separate experiences have come together leads to the collective experience of the action research. It seems also that the hermeneutic notion of experience has possibilities for ESL teaching. Time spent getting to know one another will prove beneficial to learning.

Within the shared environment of the action research, each group member has individual thoughts that develop as a result of the unique circumstances and individuality of the speaker. Through communication within the action research group, those thoughts are further influenced and developed. In terms of my own involvement, I need to consider how my thoughts were formed within the group context and what effect my involvement may have had on others through our dialogue. As the environment was relatively new to me, the question that arises is whether I was open to learning and changing my perceptions based on these new experiences. Early interactions with Emma introduced me to issues related to ESL teaching within a multicultural school. Through dialogue we also came to agreement about the action research process and how it should begin. These discussions were shaped by the knowledge we both brought together and were then molded through our interpretations of each other. My first impression of Emma was that she was a dedicated educator who was knowledgeable about ESL issues and wished to find solutions to ESL challenges that would best meet the needs of the school population. I interpreted her intentions as sincere and therefore respected her thoughts. This encouraged me to be open to learning

from the experience as I perceived her to be a reliable source of information. As well, my feeling that the school was a friendly place were students felt generally happy and secure added to my desire to learn the reasons why. I felt that Emma, too, was open to learning more about action research through our discussions and by engaging in the process.

The understandings that Emma and I came to were then added to the larger circle of understandings within the action research group. Although the individual parts that made up the group cannot be considered in isolation from each other, each person still brings particular understandings to the process and has particular impressions of what is happening within the group. Teachers come in with particular beliefs about teaching and some pre-formed impressions about their colleagues teaching styles and abilities. They have an understanding related to the school environment including the style of administration and level of support for the action research project. The administration has understandings of teachers' knowledge and abilities which shapes their interpretations of what is said. Preconceived opinions within the school very likely limited group members' openness to what others had to offer. In terms of my impressions, not having formal teaching training or knowing the teachers beforehand may have allowed me to be open in interpreting teachers' approaches. However, my own conceptual framework would have steered my interpretations in certain directions. How my conceptual framework affects my practice is a point for ongoing reflection. Individual groups members' impressions and interpretations of me would have been based on their limited knowledge of me and my background so they may have been open to new understandings, however, they would hold individual understandings of my position as a graduate assistant.

These influences add to and are shaped by the ongoing dialectic process. Gadamer (1989) reminds us it is this process of attending to what needs to be understood that leads to the truth and not particular knowledge shared by individual

group members. As time went on we came to know each other better through questioning and sharing. Through conversation we explored particular subject matter. The dialogue involved many group members asking questions and offering suggestions leading to understanding through coming to agreement on ways to address the issues. My own questions were sometimes looking for clarification, but also often to suggest possibilities based on my understandings of cultural issues in schools. As I came to learn about individual teacher's styles and approaches, my own learning began to be influenced more by some teachers than by others. A recognition of how my own beliefs about culture and schools shaped my interpretations of others' contributions may have helped me to remain more open to all that was offered. Getting to know one another better initially would help in the interpretations. My own reflections need to consider how to better facilitate this process in future research projects. All people involved in the action research group had many positive attributes and skills to offer, however, if interpretations are made based on first impressions often they may be limited.

As the circle of understanding expands, the group becomes more interdependent. We began to gel as a group as we worked together to solve common problems. As all the research questions and roles played within the school are all related, so were our attempts to develop answers. Through our experience of relating with each other our understandings of each other were continually reshaped. This in turn affected our input into the group. Coming to understand someone else's position often lead me to want to know more thereby compelling me to ask more questions of them. Reflections highlight how, as a facilitator, I should have brought more of these types of questions into the process sooner. The facilitator's role should be focused on attending to that which requires understanding. Initially all teachers appeared very similar in their approach to teaching, but as time went on these impressions were shown through experience to be false. This is the negativity of experience that helps us develop a more comprehensive knowledge. Through dialogue, the contradictions

between initial generalizations and actual reality are highlighted providing us with new understandings.

The language used within the research framework shaped our understandings and formed the reality we created. Each of us came to the process from a particular cultural background which shaped our language in unique ways. These differences contributed in different ways to our discussions and outcomes. Many of us have similarities in our cultural backgrounds as most us grew up in Canada with English as our first language. However, there are variations within the group as we come from different places, have had different experiences, and followed unique educational paths. Most of the group are teachers who completed their program in Education in Canada. For them, this particular influence on their past experience is similar. For those who attended University in other countries, the experience would be somewhat different. For those whose first language is not English, their linguistic and cultural background is greatly varied from the rest of the group. Coming together in a shared experience means potential for different interpretations and understandings. I believe the group made sincere attempts to understand and appreciate others' points of view, however, the influence of the English language and experience is difficult to overcome. We tend not to recognize its influence or our belief in its rightness.

A recognition of our own perspectives is what Hegel describes as the experience that consciousness has of itself. Being open to and learning from new experience first requires that we have the ability to find ourselves within the content. For the action research group it means not only appreciating each others' views but understanding how we are implicated within them. Unity with oneself needs to be established through openness to new experience. Learning in this way leaves us open to further learning and the development of insight. As we come to understand further we develop insight that shows us that our own influences are limited but can be greatly enhanced through working together to achieve common goals. Understanding morally

that we all belong together unites us in the struggle and opens us to what others have to contribute. Reflections on relations within the action research group, and in fact the entire educational community, is important for all members to come to an understandings of the historical dimensions we share and to learn to truly listen to one another.

Coming to understand each other through experience also seems to be important for ESL teaching in a multicultural setting. The outcomes of the study point primarily toward teachers getting to know their students, but also toward the importance of all parties involved in the education of the child getting to know each other. Often we make generalizations about particular cultures and apply that knowledge to children in the classroom. Through the experience of getting to know those children as individuals the generalizations are shown to be false and we develop more comprehensive knowledge of the child. We also come to understand the hybrid nature of culture and the importance of understanding how identity is developed within personal cultural understandings. What is true of a particular person's culture is an understanding we have to come to through dialogue with them. In order to understand students who come from different places and speak different languages we need to interpret what they are saying based on knowledge of them and self understandings.

Our general life experience gives us a starting point as we are all part of the same relative whole giving us some shared experiences. In a high immigrant and ESL classroom, the possibilities for many different interpretations of events are great. As a person's cultural background and language determine their understandings, we need to be aware of our own language and how what we say may be interpreted. Hermeneutics guides us to examine our prejudices and be careful about making hasty generalizations. By being open to new experience we can learn more about students and how they as individuals will need to learn within the ESL environment. Again we must examine ourselves to see how we are implicated in the lives of students. Power relations as well

as cultural differences will impact relations. How this manifests itself at this particular school needs to be looked at further. Teachers need to understand how they shape students' self understandings and interpretations in the classroom. Insight into experience through self knowledge will highlight suffering in historical relations and continuing on into present day. Understanding our shared history helps us develop a sense of belonging and a moral commitment to understand each other. As we create these bonds with one another we learn to truly listen. Students need to be listened to if we are to understand who they are.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

This study was designed to explore the inequities that exist within the policies and practices of a particular school environment and the individuals involved in the study. The research group wanted to understand the causes of these inequities and develop solutions to address them. This was done by using an action research methodology to explore the relationships that affect the causes and solutions within a multicultural, ESL school environment. Analysis was done using a critical Multicultural/Anti-Racism Education framework coupled with current culture and identity theoretical perspectives. I have added to this my thoughts on the relevance of the hermeneutic notion of experience to this school based research project.

As a project designed to address social inequities, this school based initiative has elements of an anti-racism educational framework and is consistent with its major understandings. Dei (1996), points out that anti-racism education is a challenge to the existing social order and the practice of the most powerful in society aspiring to set the futures of the subordinated. Through building democratic communities in schools, all voices can be given equal representation. Anti-racism education is also a challenge to existing conservative discourses and practices in schools that create racial and cultural others by negatively evaluating difference. Past attempts to provide equal access to education have not resulted in equality as they have not addressed underlying social injustices and the collective responsibilities of citizens. This project was clearly an attempt to address underlying social injustices that create barriers to learning for ESL students. Those involved in the project seem to have accepted their responsibilities as educators to provide equal opportunities to all who share the culture within their school. Dei reminds us that those who are subordinated also have a responsibility to resist their domination. We need to recognize that this resistance exists in students. However, teachers' responsibility includes recognizing the difficulties students may experience by resisting, particularly those from minority cultures. This particular school project did

not look directly at the resistance of students and would need to consider this aspect in future strategies. Educators need to make a commitment to listen to and act on minority students' voices and experiences.

Although it is important to understand culture and identity perspectives, we also need to understand the broader dialectic between social and political structures, and history and culture. Understanding and attempting to change these structures is at the heart of anti-racism education. Dei (1996), argues that anti-racism education, as social action, must start from wherever we are at. "We must engage in an educational and transformative practice, linking a politicized view of culture and identity at local levels with the broader structural objectives of global political economic transformation" (Dei, 1996:125). With this ideal in mind, action research works well as a method for school based change. For this project, the educational and transformative action began with the reflections on personal practice by the members of the research group. Their daily personal experiences and the collective experience of the group became a starting point for attempts at broader structural change.

Looking at our own practice and understanding our personal experience provides a basis for individual knowledge and action. Combining these experiences with those in the research group offers a collective knowledge on which to base our actions. These personal experiences, however, must be understood within social relations of power. Added to this is the moral commitment that we are all interdependent, a knowledge which should lead us to unity in solidarity. The hermeneutic notion of experience invites us to be open to others' experience as well as understanding our own experience. Anti-racism education works toward developing a plurality out of the understanding of those experiences which this study attempted to do. This study also shows the relevance of experience for ESL learning in a multicultural setting. Being open to the experience of students and parents was highlighted in the study outcomes. Combining these experiences with the reflections of

teachers and administrators provides an opportunity to develop a plurality of voices within the school environment. In this way, a democratic community can be built leading toward a more equitable social order, first within the school but ultimately leading toward positive social change.

Research Findings

This project was initially based on two areas of concern within the school. One was the development of academic language in ESL students and the other was a concern over cultural bias in the curriculum. The research project showed how the two concerns are actually part and parcel of the same question. Developing academic language skills in ESL students requires consideration of cultural issues. The research findings also show that the results fit with the action research theme which was, "Knowing that our students come from a variety of backgrounds, how do we ensure student learning?". The theme recognized the importance of students' backgrounds and leads well into the finding that it is important to student learning for teachers to get to know students and parents. Specifically, the research participants generated the following conclusions in relation to each research question:

1. What strategies can we employ to encompass the multiple levels of ability that are apparent within the ESL classroom?

- Reflection on personal practice was helpful in understanding current approaches and in terms of incorporating new ideas. Of particular importance were webs, graphic organizers, other visuals, and themes.
- It is extremely important to establish and maintain strong relationships with students as these relationships are vitally important to student learning.

2. Is the writing process an effective model for ESL learners?

- Reflection on personal practice was helpful in highlighting the shortcomings in the process writing approach and in analyzing and developing solutions.

- Process writing increased the confidence of ESL writers, however the process required modifications including more peer editing and modeling.
- Teacher Assistants are extremely helpful.
- It is important for student learning to develop close relationships with students.

3. What other teaching/learning strategies can we utilize to make language acquisition more comprehensive for ESL students?

- Dialogical and interactive approaches are most effective in an ESL classroom. This includes engaging students in discussion rather than having them answer direct questions and demonstrating lessons rather than strictly verbal presentations.
- It is important to explain the teaching approach to parents.

4. How can we get to know our parent population and involve them in meaningful ways?

- It is important to get to know parents and to let parents get to know teachers.
- Interpreters are needed in order to get parents involved and to be in attendance at meetings.
- Most parents have little understanding of how a school works and therefore need more information on decision making processes, what is involved in a teacher's day, and how the school is managed.

5. Does teacher assistant support in the subjects of Math and Language Arts improve overall student achievement in the grades 1-9 programs? What are the best or most promising models of teacher assistant use?

- Teacher Assistants were found to be invaluable in an ESL setting.

Action research proved to be an effective method for exploring issues of culture and language in this setting. The specific ESL findings are consistent with current ESL literature. What is particularly significant is the stress placed on the importance of

getting to know students and parents. This finding highlights the relevance of culture to ESL learning and the importance of applying culture knowledge to ESL literature. The hermeneutic notion of experience provides some insight here as well.

Directions for Future Study

As a process of reflection and enquiry, this study also identifies many areas that need further consideration. Many relationships are involved in the educational process and not all of them were explored in detail in this study. As we have seen, culture is an important consideration in these relationships and this too needs further study. Through the analysis of this study, which was based on my participation as an outside researcher and my theoretical framework, I have identified the following areas that require further study within this school context:

1. The power and resistance that is employed by students in the construction of their identities within this school environment.
2. The power inherent in teacher-student relations and how factors affecting identity relate to language acquisition. There is a need to look at how these variables change within this particular school context.
3. How students relate to one another reveals how some voices are favored over others. There is a need to explore how this affects language development.
4. Future reflections should consider ways to incorporate the voices of students in identifying problem areas and strategies for action.
5. Student voices should also be considered in terms of identifying and developing strategies for encouraging parent involvement.
6. There are many possible influences of cultural differences on relations between teachers. These should be explored along with their impact on teaching.
7. The power relations that exist within the teaching staff and between teachers and administrators.

8. The power relations that exist between the facilitator and the school staff in future action research projects.

9. The power relations that exist between the University and the school.

10. Future action research projects would need to include more encouragement on the use of and importance of journals.

11. Specifics of ESL teaching need to consider how relations amongst peers may affect writing processes such as editing.

12. There is a need to look at different learning systems that are in place in different countries in order to understand and implement appropriate strategies where necessary.

Reflections

Although each member of the action research group would have presented this project in different ways, it is clear that it was based on a serious concern for the inequities in learning opportunities they saw within their school and a vision of what education should be for all students. As a proactive strategy it is consistent with elements of an anti-racism education framework as I have chosen to show in this analysis. It is also clear that an analysis of relationships is necessary in any attempts to understand why inequities exist and what needs to be done to realize visions of positive social change. I have learned a great deal about these relationships while understanding that there is much more to understand. Action research, as a critical multiculturalism strategy, provides us with an opportunity to continue this understanding directed a providing school communities that nurture differences in an environment of equality.

Specifically, this project has highlighted for me, the importance of personal reflection. In terms of my own role as facilitator and my relationship with the group, my understandings were derived from reflections guided by my theoretical understandings. I thought a lot about how these understandings may have affected the process and the outcomes which highlighted for me how I infused my knowledge into the group, particularly by asking questions. A close examination of the research

process shows it to be a site of struggle for representation through the interplay of power relations within the group. This struggle can lead to changes in existing power relations in the school. Opportunities, such as this, to discuss common issues in an environment that is somewhat separated from daily school routine can highlight common concerns and unite group members in attempts to achieve a common goal. The focus on a common goal may serve to equalize power relations within the group. I believe this process could have been hastened by heightened attempts to get to know each other initially. It may also change relations between the group members and the rest of the school staff. These changing dynamics are points to consider in further reflections.

In terms of wider school relations, the relationships within the administration and between the administration and the teaching staff need further consideration if we are to understand how power circulates and affects attempts to implement strategies directed at equalizing opportunities for all students. This school seems to be responding well to the challenge of difference and diversity. This project is an affirmation that difference does not mean unequal or incapable as it is an attempt to eliminate the barriers that prevent equality. The administration is assisting in this challenge by not only being involved in the process but also by providing the opportunity in the first place. This is an important point as the provision of opportunities, resources, and tools to teachers sets a tone of acceptance for this type of initiative. Implementing these types of strategies is much easier when you know you will be supported.

As was noted earlier, there also needs to be more reflection on relations between the school staff and the parent population. Consistent with anti-racism and critical multiculturalism literature, the study noted that parents should not simply be plugged into schools. They should be involved in meaningful ways including sharing in decision making. The ways to make this happen, including how power dynamics may affect the process need further consideration. As well, we need to look more closely at

relations between teachers and students as students' voices were silent in this particular study. This is particularly important as students see teachers as occupying positions of power. Giving them voice begins to equalize these relations. Culture is of course a part of the consideration in all of these relations as well as in the specifics of ESL teaching. We need to look at how culture affects writing skills and what role it may play in the multiple levels of ability that exist in an ESL classroom. As well, we need to consider teacher education programs and ways to provide ESL understandings to all teacher education students. This needs to be coupled with anti-racism education and critical multiculturalism understanding and strategies.

Finally, using the hermeneutic notion of experience I have come to see action research as a circle of understanding. As participants in the process, we must all work at trying to understand each other. As Mahatma Gandhi believed, the search for truth should be a life long process. Personal growth is related to following a path which uncovers truth and goodness through acquiring knowledge of what is real. In trying to uncover the truth we must understand that truth is in others, not just in ourselves. It is this attempt to understand others' truths through a recognition of their unique experiences that leads us to the circle of understanding of the action research process. I have also come to view the facilitator's role as one that should focus on attending to that which requires understanding. That is, the facilitator should assist group members to acquire knowledge of others by asking questions and attending to areas that seem to need clarification.

Although the existence of racism and segregation is still evident in this school, this project has been a positive initiative toward understanding and eventually eliminating these barriers. Initiatives such as this provide enhanced opportunities for future strategies, directed at positve social change, as they open the door to change. Although resistance to change is a major obstacle in schools, we have seen from this study that in this particular school setting there is an environment conducive to new

opportunities. Educators need to encourage these types of initiatives if we are to ensure the best possible education for all students. As a society, we need to recognize that there is a social and economic cost to inequality and, as we are all interconnected, we all suffer under an system that in unjust. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "once all people come to understand the importance of following the path leading to truth, then there can be genuine peace in the world".

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